

JUSTICE IN *LES ROUGON-MACQUART*

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For my parents
with love and thanks

DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, do hereby declare that this thesis, *Justice in "Les Rougon-Macquart"*, was composed by me and is my own work.

Signed:

Date: 19. SEPT. 2000

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ABSTRACT

This thesis aims to pin down justice in *Les Rougon-Macquart*. Despite the relative infrequency of direct references to justice in the novels, we can nevertheless identify contradictory notions of justice, each associated with a group of characters.

Chapter One establishes the apparent lack of justice in the Darwinian universe created in the novels. The primitive communities of Bonneville (*La Joie de vivre*) and Les Artaud (*La Faute de l'abbé Mouret*) are presented as examples of Darwinism in action, environments in which there is no resistance to the Darwinian order. The essentially ambiguous presentation of Darwinism in the novels is identified, one feature of which is an apparent opening for justice to operate as a moderating influence on the injustices of Darwinism.

Chapter Two examines the special case of *Germinal*, and the calls therein for justice made by the miners under Etienne Lantier's leadership. Unlike the primitives, these characters rail against the injustices of their Darwinian situation and demand justice. They aspire towards a general social justice, which they seem to view as an alternative religion - or as an alternative to religion.

Starting from hints in *Germinal* that a legal solution to the injustices of Darwinism might be a possibility, Chapter Three assesses the potential of the legal system to operate as a force for justice. The most important part of the chapter is the discussion of the presentation of the representatives of the legal system, a portrait of unrelieved negativity. These characters view justice as the protection of the rights and social position of their class, which explains the feelings of disenfranchisement experienced by characters from lower social classes, who are convinced that the law is on the side of the princes. The ideological function of the legal system, seen in the repression of opposition and the censorship of views critical of the regime, confirms the way the legal system operates as an arm (in both senses) of the Establishment. We attribute

the failure of 'la justice' to deal in justice to its intimate association with the Second Empire.

Chapter Four examines the group of revolutionary characters and their proposals for a new social order which are framed in terms of justice. The social justice envisaged by the revolutionaries is founded on the equitable (re)distribution of the world's resources. We discover that physical aspects of the revolutionary 'type' and their lack of practical commitment disqualify these characters from the delivery of justice.

Chapter Five revolves around Pascal Rougon and the female porte-parole characters (Denise Baudu, Pauline Quenu, Caroline Hamelin and Clotilde Rougon) and their commitment to the life force ('la vie') which rolls through the cycle of novels and which appears to lead towards the 'but ignoré' of nature, a feature of which is justice of a more abstract and apolitical variety than that pursued in the earlier chapters by the other groups of characters.

The Conclusion amounts to an assessment of the credibility of the characters promoting various 'spins' on justice. We suggest that it is the female porte-parole characters with their attitude of indifference towards justice as an intellectual concept, but with their practice of small-scale justice in relation to those characters around them, who represent the closest thing to justice in *Les Rougon-Macquart*. The best bet, however, for justice in a more general and pure state is identified in the utopia of the 'but ignoré', which is located beyond the novels.

REFERENCES AND ABBREVIATIONS

Unless otherwise stated, all page references to the constituent novels of *Les Rougon-Macquart* are to the Pléiade edition compiled by Armand Lanoux and Henri Mitterand, 5 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1960-1967). In the body of the text and in the notes, titles are abbreviated for reasons of space, and are given in parentheses below.

Primary Sources

RM I contains *La Fortune des Rougon* (*Fortune*), *La Curée* (*Curée*), *Le Ventre de Paris* (*Ventre*), *La Conquête de Plassans* (*Conquête*) and *La Faute de l'abbé Mouret* (*Faute*).

RM II contains *Son Excellence Eugène Rougon* (*Excellence*), *L'Assommoir* (*Assommoir*), *Une Page d'amour* (*Page*) and *Nana*.

RM III contains *Pot-Bouille*, *Au Bonheur des Dames* (*Bonheur*), *La Joie de vivre* (*Joie*) and *Germinal*.

RM IV contains *L'Œuvre* (*Œuvre*), *La Terre* (*Terre*), *Le Rêve* (*Rêve*) and *La Bête humaine* (*Bête*).

RM V contains *L'Argent* (*Argent*), *La Débâcle* (*Débâcle*) and *Le Docteur Pascal* (*Pascal*).

The references contain the name of the novel and the page number, for example: *Pot-Bouille* 259. References to the critical apparatus contain the volume number and page number, for example: RM III 1642.

Secondary Sources

CN refers to: *Les Cahiers Naturalistes*.

Miscellanées Mitterand refers to: Hamon, Philippe, and Leduc-Adine, Jean-Pierre, eds., *Mimesis et semiosis : littérature et représentation - miscellanées offertes à Henri Mitterand* (Paris: Nathan, 1992).

Craft of Fiction refers to : Lethbridge, Robert, and Keefe, Terry, eds., *Zola and the craft of fiction - essays in honour of F.W.J. Hemmings* (Leicester, London and New York: Leicester University Press, 1990).

Naudin-Patriat refers to: Naudin-Patriat, Françoise, *Ténèbres et lumière de l'argent : la représentation de l'ordre social dans "Les Rougon-Macquart"* (Dijon: Université de Dijon, Travaux de la Faculté de Droit et de Science Politique, 1981).

Centenary Colloquium refers to: Pollard, Patrick, ed., *Emile Zola Centenary Colloquium 1893-1993* (London: The Emile Zola Society, 1995).

Glasgow Colloque refers to: Woollen, Geoff, ed., *Zola : "La Bête humaine" : textes et explications* (Glasgow: University of Glasgow French and German Publications, 1990).

INTRODUCTION

It is difficult not to be influenced by the generally received association made between Zola and justice. More famous amongst the public at large for his defence of Alfred Dreyfus than for his novels (although the information panel beside his tomb in the Panthéon does refer to *Les Rougon-Macquart* in passing), the *Maître de Médan* is forever linked to the words 'justice' and 'vérité' which are studded throughout his pronouncements during *L’Affaire* and in the later cycles of novels. Would a similar pattern be observable in his earlier, greater cycle of novels (or earlier cycle of greater novels!)?

The objective of this thesis is to locate justice in *Les Rougon-Macquart*. The starting point for this study was an examination of the operation of the legal system in Zola's cycle of novels, which led to the view that the relationship between the legal system and justice was tenuous to the point of nonexistence. This quest is not one on which to embark optimistically, given the unequivocal failure of the legal system ('la justice'), which is in many ways the most obvious potential repository of justice, to live up to its name and deliver justice.

What became clear in the course of this initial inquiry was that groups of characters other than those associated with the legal system (perhaps particularly those not involved in the administration of justice in the novels) were seeking justice, and offered different views on where it might be located or how it might be brought about. The structure of the thesis is based on the identification of these different groups of characters. In each instance (with the exception of *Germinal*, which is a special case in more than one regard, as we shall see in Chapter Two) there is the possibility for identifying a 'type' of character in each of these spheres and a type of justice sought.

The principal practical difficulty we face is the relative dearth of direct references to justice in *Les Rougon-Macquart*. This meagre supply of source material does not prevent the presentation of conflicting attitudes towards the concept. Jaundiced critics might jump on this as further proof of Zola's pathological inconsistency, but to us this seems to put it a little harshly. We found that a reasonable way of looking at the twenty volume cycle was to acknowledge that the young man who penned *Fortune* in 1869 was twenty-five years older, and living in completely different circumstances, when *Pascal* was completed. It seems to us that some of the conflicting views can be 'explained' chronologically - that they reflect a change in attitude over the years rather than some sort of authorial negligence. We shall suggest that viewed as a whole, the attitude towards justice in the novels reflects an eminently logical progression.

The first chapter seeks to establish the Darwinian universe of *Les Rougon-Macquart*, and therein an apparent absence of justice, where patterns of vocabulary and imagery relating to Zola's interpretation of Darwinism complement the struggles for dominance which characterise the novels. The primitives - members of the communities of Les Artaud (*Faute*) and Bonneville (*Joie*) - accept the Darwinian organisation of society, and appear untroubled by the patent absence of justice.

The second chapter is arranged around the calls for justice made by the miners in *Germinal*. The miners' attitude towards justice changes as the novel, and the strike itself, wears on. In Chapter Two we shall see how the miners build justice up as an alternative religion (or as an alternative to religion). This is also the attitude of the revolutionary characters of Chapter Four, and raises the following issue: if justice is viewed as the objective of a religion, does that not have the effect of removing it from the human domain and into a realm beyond?

Chapter Three contains much of what was the original project for the thesis - the examination of the presentation of the legal system in *Les Rougon-Macquart*. The main part of the chapter is devoted to the presentation of the representatives of the legal system - from the legislature (politicians and parliamentarians), to the judiciary and legal practitioners of all sorts - and what a damning portrait it is of this group of

characters! The extent to which this negative depiction has implications for the legal system's delivery of justice is examined in some detail. Does the legal system in *Les Rougon-Macquart* operate as a vehicle for justice, and as an antidote to the injustices of Darwinism? The use of the legal system for political or ideological ends, and the feeling of disenfranchisement sensed by various characters from the lower classes, suggest not. We also observe the intimate (and necessary) connection between a legal system and the regime which instituted it and which is instituted by it.

Chapter Four is devoted to those characters we have labelled the revolutionaries - Silvère Mouret (*Fortune*), Florent (*Ventre*), Etienne Lantier (*Germinal*) and Sigismond Busch (*Argent*). Given their status as opponents of the Second Empire (which was slated so categorically by Zola), there is reason to be hopeful that their particular notion of justice might prove more viable.

Chapter Five centres on Pascal Rougon, one of the most important characters in *Les Rougon-Macquart*, and a group we have called the female porte-parole characters. They are Denise Baudu (*Bonheur*), Pauline Quenu (*Joie*), Caroline Hamelin (*Argent*) and Clotilde Rougon (*Pascal*). Unlike the miners and the revolutionaries, this group of characters does not promote a political programme, but is nevertheless committed to a process of change (perhaps progress itself) leading towards a new social order. They too have an alternative faith - in the life force ('la vie') and its inexorable progress towards the 'but ignoré'. The 'but ignoré' is one formulation of many used in the novels to suggest a glorious new world order which lies somewhere in the middle-distance. Very similar to the concept of 'bonheur universel' which is articulated by the revolutionaries, one constituent part of the 'but ignoré' appears to be justice.

In the final chapter we will observe a curious attitude on the part of the female porte-parole characters towards the whole notion of justice - they are not unlike the primitives in their attitude of indifference towards it. This is not to say that it is something which they do not value, but that it is something which is to be practised rather than formulated into statements of principle and preached with a zealot's blinkered approach, as the revolutionaries (Pascal among them) do. This apparent

split between the approach of male and female characters is discussed.

Our conclusion is essentially an assessment of the different character types identified in the earlier chapters and their differing attitudes towards justice and their respective definitions of the concept which Zola appears to leave wide open. We note how this is consistent with a general anti-metaphysical tone which seems, on some level, to inform *Les Rougon-Macquart*. In such shifting sands one clings to what one feels to be the most secure, and we consider that it is the calibre of the characters themselves which either gives credibility to their particular enunciations on justice, or undermines them altogether.

CHAPTER ONE

JUSTICE ABSENT : DARWINISM

Our quest for justice in the novels begins by establishing its apparent absence, seen most clearly in the Darwinian environment which characterises the world of *Les Rougon-Macquart*. After a brief introduction to Darwinism in the novels, we will establish the patterns of terminology and imagery relating to it. This is followed by an examination of the scope of Darwinian struggles in the cycle - including the extended examples of Darwinism in the primitive communities of Les Artaud (*Faute*) and Bonneville (*Joie*). The ambiguity of the presentation of Darwinism in the novels is analysed as are the implications for justice, which would logically appear to be excluded in a Darwinian universe. Foreshadowing a later chapter of the thesis, parallels will be drawn between Darwinism and the important concept of the 'but ignoré', one of the central elements of the philosophy of Pascal Rougon and his band of enlightened initiates.

Zola's flirtation with contemporary developments in science and philosophy is well documented. In the late nineteenth century a theory enjoying considerable influence was Charles Darwin's. Zola was seduced by the evolutionary theory, and particularly interested in the notion of the survival of the fittest. Darwin's theories were bound to appeal to Zola, given the common ground between them and the novelist's long-standing interest in issues such as power and control, and in the pseudo-scientific atmosphere which, through the device of heredity and the character of Pascal Rougon, Zola hoped to integrate into his novels.

Zola evidently found Darwinism an attractive philosophy and was aware of its suitability to his series of novels.¹ The novelist understood Darwinism as a logical movement towards an improved human species, which tied in with Zola's latent utopianism. The interpretation of Darwinism attributed to Etienne Lantier in *Germinal* (which we shall see in the next section) is very close to Zola's conception of Darwin's theories as presented in the novels.

Etienne's 'spin' on Darwinism shows the common departure from Darwin's original theory - that the survival of the fittest related to a competition between different species - by establishing the combat between members and classes of the same species. Etienne is not the only person guilty of a half-digested appreciation of Darwin, as Zola too deals in a revolutionary interpretation of Darwin's theories, cutting them to fit his broader social concerns.² But the aim of this chapter is not to compare the Darwinian universe established by Zola in the cycle of novels with Darwin's theory (the abyss stretches as wide as that between Zola's own theoretical writings and his fiction), but to see, given Zola's interpretation of Darwinism, what the implications are for justice in *Les Rougon-Macquart*.

If anything, the Darwinism in the novels exhibits more of the hallmarks of Herbert Spencer's social Darwinism than Charles Darwin's own philosophy. Social Darwinism lacks one of the neglected aspects of Darwin's original conception - namely cooperation amongst members of the species in its struggle for survival. As Robert J. Neiss explains:

Comme philosophie de la lutte vitale entre hommes, entre classes, entre nations ou entre races, le darwinisme social est puissamment individualiste : l'égoïsme devient le grand mobile des actions humaines, et les instincts les plus bas, l'instinct de la rapacité, par exemple, deviennent la loi universelle de la nature.³

¹ Auguste Dezalay considers Zola's interpretation of Darwinism as one of the pillars of the cycle. 'Le progrès de la société romanesque décrite - ou imaginée - par Zola est fondé, nous le savons, sur la sélection des plus aptes à la "lutte pour la vie"' (*L'Opéra des "Rougon-Macquart" : essai de rythmologie romanesque* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1983), p.67).

² Kelly Basilio sees Darwin as one of the theorists of whose works Zola made selective use for his own purposes: 'Ainsi applique-t-il à son étude la thèse de Darwin de la lutte des espèces' ('Zola et la science: une esthétique et une poétique', in *Centenary Colloquium*, pp.135-140, p.139).

³ 'Zola et le capitalisme : le darwinisme social', *CN*, 54 (1980), 57-67 (p.59).

Social Darwinism provides a philosophical pretext for brutal capitalism and laissez-faire policies. This rampant individualism is indeed a characteristic of the world in *Les Rougon-Macquart*. Whilst Neiss does not label Zola an unconditional devotee of social Darwinism, he suggests that in those novels in the cycle where the treatment of economic and political questions is central, there is 'une sorte de bréviaire de la nouvelle philosophie' (p.62). He concludes that there is a general Darwinian thrust in *Les Rougon-Macquart*, with a pattern of violent struggles and cutthroat competition characterising the novels. We shall return to social Darwinism later in this chapter.

The vocabulary and imagery of Darwinism

Les Rougon-Macquart bristle with conflict and the confrontation of forces. The pattern of struggles for control is easily discernible, and, in many cases, is flagged by the consistent use of terminology derived from Zola's interpretation of Darwin's theories. This section will discuss the vocabulary and imagery associated with Darwinism in the novels, patterns of which serve as Zola's little reminders to the reader of the Darwinian implications of certain situations.

In a handful of cases there is an explicit reference to Darwin and his theories.⁴ In the world established by Zola in the novels, some of the characters are aware of its Darwinian nature, and enunciate that awareness in the discourse of Darwinism itself. Words such as 'appétit' and 'intérêt', for example, take on a loaded sense. The vast majority of the characters, however, have neither the awareness nor the intellectual wherewithal to do so, and articulate their vague feelings with terms such as 'le plus fort' or expressions using verbs like 'avalier', 'dévorer' and 'manger' to suggest the relationship between two sides in a conflict.⁵

⁴ Darwin's scientific work is mentioned in the catalogue of Pascal Rougon's research : 'Il était donc allé des gemmules de Darwin, de sa pangenèse, à la périgénèse de Haeckel, en passant par les stirpes de Galton' (*Pascal* 946).

⁵ The Rougon family have prodigious appetites, a trait they share with the Second Empire as a whole, as Zola points out in the 'Notes générales sur la marche de l'œuvre'. 'Je le base donc sur une vérité du temps : la bousculade des ambitions et des appétits. J'étudie les ambitions et les appétits d'une famille lancée à travers le monde moderne' (*RM* V 1738-1739).

Germinal contains the most explicit references to Darwinism, the pretext being Etienne Lantier's eclectic selection of reading matter which includes the edited highlights of the works of Charles Darwin.

Etienne, maintenant, en était à Darwin. Il en avait lu des fragments, résumés et vulgarisés dans un volume à cinq sous; et, de cette lecture mal comprise, il se faisait une idée révolutionnaire du combat pour l'existence, les maigres mangeant les gras, le peuple fort dévorant la blême bourgeoisie. Mais Souvarine s'emporta, se répandit sur la bêtise des socialistes qui acceptent Darwin, cet apôtre de l'inégalité scientifique, dont la fameuse sélection n'était bonne que pour des philosophes aristocrates. (*Germinal* 1524)

This passage contains a range of the key terms used elsewhere in *Les Rougon-Macquart* and which are explicitly associated here with Darwin and his theories. For example, 'combat pour l'existence', the 'maigres'/'gras' opposition, the verbs 'manger' and 'dévoré'.⁶ The extension of the struggle for survival to the context of inter-class conflict should also be noted, and will be discussed further below.⁷ Souvarine's dissent represents the view of socialists who perceived that the application of Darwinian theories in the form of laissez-faire economic and social policies would perpetuate inequality between the classes. Towards the end of the novel, the collapse of the trades union organisation the *Internationale* (torn apart by competing power struggles within) is presented as a victim of Darwinism, causing Etienne to wonder if there is any escape from a world arranged along Darwinian lines.⁸ Given his exposure to a bastardised version of Darwin's theories, it is no surprise that elements of the Darwinian discourse have filtered into Etienne's own speech and world view.

⁶ In his study of *Terre* and its preparatory documents, "*La Terre*" d'Emile Zola : étude historique et critique (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1952) Guy Robert highlights a difference between the final version of the novel and one of the earlier drafts. In the scene where Hourdequin and Chédeville discuss the tension between protectionism and free market policies, 'dévorons-nous les uns les autres' replaces 'mangeons les uns les autres' (p.255), suggesting firstly Zola's use of the terms interchangeably and secondly his awareness of the need for variation in the repetition of the same Darwinian points.

⁷ The image of the new social order at the end of *Germinal* is presented in Darwinian terminology : 'S'il fallait qu'une classe fût mangée, n'était-ce pas le peuple, vivace, neuf encore, qui mangerait la bourgeoisie épuisée de jouissance?' (*Germinal* 1589).

⁸ 'Décidément, tout se gâtait, lorsque chacun tirait à soi le pouvoir. Ainsi, cette fameuse Internationale qui aurait dû renouveler le monde, avortait d'impuissance, après avoir vu son armée formidable se diviser, s'émietter dans des querelles intérieures. Darwin avait-il donc raison, le monde ne serait-il qu'une bataille, les forts mangeant les faibles, pour la beauté et la continuité de l'espèce?' (*Germinal* 1589).

The more accessible Darwinian notion of 'le plus fort' is frequently used by Etienne and those around him. Etienne advocates establishing a strike fund on the basis that "quand on a de l'argent, on est fort" (*Germinal* 1265). Recognising that the Company holds all the cards, he urges caution to Maheu: "Quand on n'est pas les plus forts, on doit être les plus sages" (1184). Deneulin rails against the striking miners who are ruining his company and shooting themselves in the foot into the bargain: "Tas de bandits, vous verrez ça, quand nous serons redevenus les plus forts!" (1411). When Etienne returns to the mine after the failed strike, Dansaert's smirk conveys his animosity: 'le fort des forts était donc par terre?' (1534).

Ventre provides the stage for the conflict of the 'Gras' and the 'Maigres', a combat of mythical significance.⁹ The terms 'maigre' and 'gras', are appropriately harmonious with not only the novel's title, but also with the verbs mentioned earlier ('avalier', 'dévorer' and 'manger') which appear elsewhere in the series, but in the third novel of the cycle they are prominent to the extent of overwhelming the text.¹⁰ 'Gras' and 'maigre' appear to be used interchangeably with 'fort' and 'faible', two other terms heavy with Darwinian significance.

Each major character in the novel is either a 'Gras' - for example the Quenu family, down to and including their cat, Mouton - or a 'Maigre', such as Florent, some of his fellow revolutionaries, and the painter Claude Lantier.¹¹ Physical appearance is a

⁹ In his notes to the Pléiade edition, Henri Mitterand refers twice to the mythical quality of the conflict: 'le mythe des Gras et des Maigres' (*RM I* 1611) and 'le mythe de la bataille des Gras et des Maigres' (1617). In his discussion of the reception of Zola in England, Colin Burns reveals that the title for one of the English translations of *Ventre* was *The Fat and the Thin*, suggesting the importance of the Darwinian conflict in the novel. 'La Présence d'Emile Zola en Angleterre', in *Miscellanées Mitterand*, pp. 487-504 (p.489).

¹⁰ The terms featured in the passage from *Germinal* quoted above. In *Bonheur*, Mouret's lieutenant Bourdoncle assesses the Darwinian structure imposed by his superior on the operation of the department store. 'Il était emporté par le jeu de la machine, pris de l'appétit des autres, de la voracité qui, de bas en haut, jetait les maigres à l'extermination des gras' (*Bonheur* 774). Saccard's battle with Gundermann for control of the Stock Exchange is governed by: 'l'atroce loi des forts, ceux qui mangent pour ne pas être mangés' (*Argent* 316).

¹¹ Upon his return to Paris, Florent scarcely recognises his half-brother: 'Ils suaient la santé; ils étaient superbes, carrés, luisants; ils le regardaient avec l'étonnement de gens très gras pris d'une vague inquiétude en face d'un maigre. [...] Et le chat lui-même, dont la peau pétait de graisse, arrondissait ses yeux jaunes, l'examinait d'un air défiant' (*Ventre* 639). Gavard's preference for his fellow Gras extends to animals: 'il ne caressait jamais que les chats et les chiens très gras, goûtant une satisfaction personnelle aux échines rondes et nourries' (664).

useful guide to the status of characters, but it is not definitive.¹² There is an instinctive antagonism between the groups, as Claude states bluntly to Florent :

'En principe, vous entendez, un Gras a l'horreur d'un Maigre, si bien qu'il éprouve le besoin de l'ôter de sa vue, à coups de dents, ou à coups de pieds.'¹³

The Gras are the complacent bourgeois, the much maligned 'honnêtes gens' who side with the Second Empire and eliminate those, primarily Maigres, who threaten their safe and self-satisfied existence.¹⁴ The full ideological implications of the 'maigre'/'gras' conflict will be discussed below.

This combat is the subject of one of Claude's artistic projects. He plans a series of etchings depicting 'la bataille des Gras et des Maigres' (*Ventre* 804), in which he sees all society encapsulated, from the times of Cain (Gras) and Abel (Maigre), a vision which reflects the mythical quality to which Zola aspired.¹⁵

Il voyait là tout le drame humain; il finit par classer les hommes en Maigres et en Gras, en deux groupes hostiles dont l'un dévore l'autre, s'arrondit le ventre et jouit.¹⁶

The terms 'appétit' and 'intérêt' characterise the Darwinian universe which is Octave Mouret's department store in *Bonheur*. Jurate Kaminskas identifies 'manger' as one of the key words in the novel.¹⁷ Mouret's management operates along Darwinian

¹² Claude Lantier divides the characters into the two enemy camps. He also suggests that in each Maigre there is a Gras wanting to get out. He cites the cases of Mlle Saget and Mme Lecœur as "Maigres désespérés, capables de tout pour engraisser" (*Ventre* 806). Likewise, Gavard is not entirely as he presents himself: "Gavard est un Gras, mais un Gras qui pose pour le Maigre" (*ibid.*). Mme François is the only character to escape classification: "C'est une brave femme, Mme François, voilà tout ... Elle n'est ni dans les Gras ni dans les Maigres, parbleu!" (*ibid.*).

¹³ *Ventre* 805. Teeth seem an appropriate weapon for the Gras, given their association with eating and consumption.

¹⁴ According to Elliott M. Grant that distinction is not a water-tight one: 'Zola's concept of deadly conflict between the fat and the thin really cuts across class lines' (*Emile Zola* (New York: Twayne, 1966), p.68). Perhaps the distinction is more one of ideological aspirations.

¹⁵ "Depuis le premier meurtre, ce sont toujours les grosses faims qui ont sucé le sang des petits mangeurs ... C'est une continuelle ripaille, du plus faible au plus fort, chacun avalant son voisin et se trouvant avalé à son tour..." (*Ventre* 805). Note the references to eating ('faim' and 'mangeur') and the repetition of forms of 'aval' and the appearance of 'faible' and 'fort' in the passage.

¹⁶ *Ventre* pp.804-805. Claude believes that his status as a Maigre has ruined his career as a painter, and is the source of his creative torment and inability to make his name in a world ruled by the Gras.

¹⁷ 'Dans la première moitié du roman, les femmes sont plutôt les objets que les sujets du verbe "manger". La deuxième partie en mettant en scène Denise, la "mangeuse de chair déguisée", instaure la

lines, the entrepreneur knowingly playing his employees' appetites and ambitions off against each other. By encouraging an atmosphere of competition between his employees, through the sale on commission system he institutes, Mouret himself profits from the cutthroat rivalry which ensues as the sales clerks strive to outsell each other in the quest for bonus payments.

Il intéressait désormais ses vendeurs à la vente de toutes les marchandises, il leur accordait un tant pour cent sur le moindre bout d'étoffe, le moindre objet vendu par eux : mécanisme qui avait bouleversé les nouveautés, qui créait entre les commis une lutte pour l'existence, dont les patrons bénéficiaient. Cette lutte devenait du reste entre ses mains la formule favorite, le principe d'organisation qu'il appliquait constamment. Il lâchait les passions, mettait les forces en présence, laissait les gros manger les petits, et s'engraissait de cette bataille des intérêts.¹⁸

The expressions 'lutte pour l'existence' and 'bataille des intérêts' are unambiguous allusions to Zola's interpretation of Darwinism, and these explicit references to struggles will be seen again in *Germinal* and later novels in the cycle. The prevailing atmosphere of competition in the department store troubles Denise Baudu, although others, such as Hutin and Favier, appear to prosper.¹⁹ The word 'lutte' is frequently repeated in connection with the working conditions in the store, where it appears that all is fair in love, war, and sales figures.²⁰

The Darwinian nature of financial speculation and the operation of the stock market is seen in *Argent*, and is extrapolated into a vision of a new economic order,

femme comme sujet' ('Itinéraires de la femme seule à Paris : pour une lecture renouvelée d'*Au Bonheur des Dames*', *Excavatio*, 6-7 (1995), 133-142, p.141).

¹⁸ *Bonheur* 421. Note the Darwinian tussle envisaged between the 'gros' and the 'petits', and the use of eating imagery in 'manger' and 'engraisser'. A further element of Mouret's management practice is to award bonus payments to those who spot errors in receipts and calculations made by their colleagues. 'Cette application nouvelle de la lutte pour l'existence l'enchantait, il avait le génie de la mécanique administrative, il rêvait d'organiser la maison de manière à exploiter les appétits des autres, pour le contentement tranquille et complet de ses propres appétits. Quand on voulait faire rendre aux gens tout leur effort, disait-il souvent, et même tirer d'eux un peu d'honnêteté, il fallait d'abord les mettre aux prises avec leurs besoins' (422).

¹⁹ In Old French 'un hutin' is a struggle or quarrel. Françoise Naudin-Patriat describes the atmosphere in the store as follows : 'Le *Bonheur des Dames* est le théâtre d'une guerre permanente entre les appétits des employés, chacun rêvant de supplanter son rival dans la place supérieure' *Ténèbres et lumière de l'argent. La représentation de l'ordre social dans "Les Rougon-Macquart"* (Dijon: Université de Dijon, 1981), p.120.

²⁰ It is a 'lutte sourde' (*Bonheur* 481) which saps energy and even sexuality. 'C'était une lutte sourde, où elles-mêmes apportaient une égale âpreté; et, dans leur fatigue commune, toujours sur pied, la chair morte, les sexes disparaissaient, il ne restait plus face à face que des intérêts contraires, irrités par la fièvre du négoce' (495). Between Hutin and Favier it is 'une lutte sans trêve ni pitié' (479).

complementing that already foreshadowed in *Bonheur*. Aristide Saccard, like his nephew Octave Mouret, sees business and commercial practices in terms of the big swallowing up the small, the strong prospering and profiting at the expense of the weak.²¹ For the financier, speculation epitomises both the struggle for existence and the life-force itself. Saccard appears to suggest that struggling is the inherent nature of life.²²

The revolutionary Sigismond Busch approves of the development of big units of production, as the progression towards a socialist nationalisation of banks and business will be easier with the ground work already in place.²³ Saccard's struggle with the Jewish banker Gundermann for control of the Paris Stock Exchange is expressed in terms with a Darwinian resonance such as 'le plus fort' and forms of the verb 'manger'.

Se battre, être le plus fort dans la dure guerre de la spéculation, manger les autres pour ne pas qu'ils vous mangent, c'était, après sa soif de splendeur et de jouissance, la grande cause, l'unique cause de sa passion des affaires.²⁴

In *Débâcle* the Franco-Prussian war is a particularly obvious portrayal of a struggle for survival, where not being 'le plus fort' has dramatic consequences on an international scale. Foreshadowed by the financier Moser's comments in *Argent* on the threat of war with Prussia, there is a consistent use of Zola's Darwinian terminology in the later novel.

²¹ As he explains to the Hamelins : "Les syndicats," murmura Saccard, "l'avenir semble être là, aujourd'hui ... C'est une forme si puissante de l'association! Trois ou quatre petites entreprises, qui végètent isolément, deviennent d'une vitalité et d'une prospérité irrésistibles, si elles se réunissent..." (*Argent* 62). A similar end result is brought about in *Germinal*, where the small companies weakened by the strikes fall prey to those with larger financial reserves, and are absorbed into the new whole, such as 'la puissance invincible des gros capitaux, si forts dans la bataille, qu'ils s'engraissaient de la défaite en mangeant les cadavres des petits, tombés à leur côté' (*Germinal* 1464).

²² Saccard attempts to persuade Mme Caroline to his point of view : "Mais la spéculation, c'est l'appât même de la vie, c'est l'éternel désir qui force à lutter et à vivre" (*Argent* 135).

²³ "Tout accaparement, toute centralisation conduit au collectivisme. Vous nous donnez une leçon pratique, de même que les grandes propriétés absorbant les lopins de terre, les grands producteurs dévorant les ouvriers en chambre, les grandes maisons de crédit et les grands magasins tuant toute concurrence, s'engraissant de la ruine des petites banques et des petites boutiques, sont un acheminement lent, mais certain, vers le nouvel état social..." (*Argent* 44).

²⁴ *Argent* 57. Note the use of 'battre' and 'guerre', which are complemented elsewhere in the novel by the frequent use of 'lutte'. In another passage, similar terminology is used : 'Pouvait-on se laisser manger et ne pas manger les autres? C'était la vie' (245).

'Je ne dis pas que nous devons faire la guerre à la Prusse, pour l'empêcher de s'engraisser aux dépens du Danemark; seulement, il y avait des moyens d'action ... Oui, oui, lorsque les gros se mettent à manger les petits, on ne sait jamais où ça s'arrête...' (*Argent* 14-15)

After all, what is a more compelling example of the struggle for existence than a war between two nations?²⁵ Sandy Petrey states the prominence of a brutal Darwinian view in the novel:

Tout semble s'orienter vers l'articulation d'un darwinisme à outrance, vers la glorification de la lutte pour la vie qui finit inévitablement par la victoire du plus fort.²⁶

At several points in the novel, comparisons are made between the French and Prussian armies, the former badly equipped and poorly led, the latter formidably well organised and moving with inexorable mathematical logic towards victory.²⁷

One of the most trusted characters in the cycle, Jean Macquart, accepts the French defeat as a reflection of France's having been weaker on the day. As he and Henriette follow the progress of the campaign through newspaper reports, Jean concludes: "C'est donc ça que nous n'avons pas été les plus forts!" (*Débâcle* 799). He uses similar reasoning in his response to the destructive actions of the Communards, angry that they perpetuated the bloodshed and damage through their resistance to the superior forces stacked against them.

Brûler les maisons, brûler les palais, parce qu'on n'était pas les plus forts, ah ça, non, par exemple! Il n'y avait que des bandits capables d'un coup pareil. (*Débâcle* 883)

The Darwinian notion of 'le plus fort' is also attributed to other soldiers taken prisoner at Sedan. Relief that the battle is over is reinforced by their belief that

²⁵ Robert J. Neiss remarks that war is the logical extreme of social Darwinism. 'Mais la chose qui est peut-être la plus caractéristique de la philosophie social-darwinienne, c'est son amour de la force et de la guerre, suprême incarnation de la force' (*CN* 54 (1980), p.60).

²⁶ 'La République de *La Débâcle*', *CN*, 54 (1980), 87-95 p.94.

²⁷ As Brian Nelson observes: 'One of Zola's aims in the novel was to demonstrate the Darwinian proposition that the machine-like efficiency, firm discipline and good leadership of the Prussian army could not but defeat its disorganised, ill-equipped and incompetently led adversary' (*Zola and the Bourgeoisie. A study of themes and techniques in "Les Rougon-Macquart"* (London: Macmillan, 1983), p.33).

prolonging a battle against a stronger enemy is pointless.²⁸ The 'mangeur'/'mangé' image also makes an appearance in the novel.²⁹

The vocabulary elements described above are complemented by patterns of imagery in the novels which underline the Darwinian nature of the universe created by Zola. One of the principal examples is the image of 'la curée', which symbolises the Second Empire. It is the title of the second novel of the *Rougon-Macquart* cycle, and the image pervades the series, appearing particularly in contexts related to the régime. In *Excellence* the point is underlined by a scene at Compiègne of the hunting dogs slavering over the quarry. The connection of this image to the Darwinian vocabulary of eating and consumption is clear.³⁰ In his discussion of patterns of animal imagery Brian Nelson identifies the prominence of the 'curée' image.³¹

The struggle between Saccard and Gundermann for control of the Paris Stock Exchange is described in military terms, a particular concentration of which occurs in the last stages of their conflict. Saccard and his 'furieuse envie de bataille' (*Argent* 57) are given a run for their money by Gundermann and his mythical fortune. For Saccard, 'chaque jour amena sa bataille' (332), in his incarnation as a 'chef d'armée convaincu' (315) who raises 'l'armée des six cents millions et les faisait tuer pour sa gloire' (316). The identification between Saccard and Napoléon Bonaparte is presented explicitly in the closing pages of the novel, the collapse of the Banque Universelle being Saccard's Waterloo. Zola is aware of the collateral damage of this

²⁸ 'Enfin, c'était donc le bout de leur misère, ils étaient prisonniers, ils ne se battraient plus! Depuis tant de jours, ils souffraient de trop marcher, de ne pas manger! D'ailleurs, à quoi bon se battre, puisqu'on n'était pas les plus forts?' (*Débâcle* 722-723).

²⁹ Chouteau knocks over Loubet and escapes past him to freedom whilst his brother in arms is beaten to death by Prussian soldiers. 'Voilà comment il se faisait que, si malin qu'on fût, on se laissait tout de même manger un jour!' (*Débâcle* 782). On the battlefield, the frenzied killing is attributed to 'la folie furieuse de l'homme en train de manger l'homme' (638).

³⁰ Remarking on the importance of the metaphor of eating in the novels, Neide de Faria examines the connection between a "loi de la vie" and what she terms a "complexe de Moloch". 'L'univers se présente comme une sorte de faim, de digestion perpétuelle et tout être y devient capable de 'manger', d'avalier', de 'dévorer' etc.' (*Structure et unité dans 'Les Rougon-Macquart' : la poétique du cycle* (Paris: Nizet, 1977), p.261). She continues: 'Toutes sortes de possessions, de luttes, de rivalités, d'efforts, ou même des actions banales sont traduites par des images qui renvoient au "monde-ogre"' (*ibid.* pp.261-262).

³¹ 'The animal analogies are sometimes inconsistent and confused, but the motif of 'la curée' tends to dominate Zola's bestiary; the *Rougon-Macquart* is as much a world of predators and victims as Balzac's *Comédie humaine*. [...] Silvère, Miette, Florent, [François] Mouret and Renée are all victims

struggle between the two financial titans, which is expressed both through *discours indirect libre* and his porte-parole, Mme Caroline.³² The vocabulary of winners and losers complements the military imagery.

One the key terms in Zola's Darwinian discourse is that of 'le plus fort' (the strongest, the fittest, the best suited) as we have seen in the preceding discussion. This section is a brief catalogue of the qualities of 'le plus fort' as demonstrated in the novels. This movement towards a definition of the New Man who will dominate the new world order prefigures the 'but ignoré' and Zola's utopianism, which are discussed in more detail in Chapter Five. The goal of the Darwinian struggle is suggested in a reflection imputed to Maurice (*Débâcle*) about France's military dominance (forged in the Napoleonic era) being surpassed by that of the Prussians :

N'était-ce pas un âge guerrier qui finissait, un autre qui commençait? Malheur à qui s'arrête dans l'effort continu des nations, la victoire est à ceux qui marchent à l'avant-garde, aux plus savants, aux plus sains, aux plus forts. (*Débâcle* 454)

Whereas the traditional connection with physical strength and aptitude seems clearly established in the texts, this passage introduces other qualities into the Darwinian sphere. Here 'savant' (which parallels the 'intelligent' found elsewhere) and 'sain' complement the familiar 'plus forts'. Elsewhere 'digne' is used, as is the speculative, and loaded, 'heureux', which can be connected to the goal of 'bonheur'.³³

The scope of Darwinian struggles in *Les Rougon-Macquart*

The previous section made reference to those texts where Darwinian notions are a prominent, and explicitly expressed, part of the novels. Having identified elements of terminology used in the novels to describe the Darwinian universe created by Zola,

in a society governed by a dog-eat-dog mentality. [...] The speculators and fortune-hunters evoked in *La Curée* are thus seen as savage predatory animals' (Nelson, *Bourgeoisie*, p.12).

³² '[C]e duel de Saccard et de Gundermann dans lequel le vainqueur perdait tout son sang, ce corps à corps des deux monstres légendaires, écrasant entre eux les pauvres diables qui se risquaient à jouer leur jeu' (*Argent* 314-315).

³³ On 'digne', Robert J. Neiss offers: 'Les riches et les puissants sont les "aptes", les "dignes" comme Zola les appelait; les pauvres, les malades, les attardés méritent leur sort' (*CN* 54 (1980), p.59).

this section examines the scope of Darwinian struggles in the novels, a scope which ranges from the individual to the international. The aim is to show the extent to which *Les Rougon-Macquart* are steeped in conflict and power struggles.³⁴

The discussion will do no more than touch on here the pattern of hierarchies which are established in the novels, such as the chains of command in the mine or the department store, or the patriarchal structure of the peasant family, all of which operate along lines of strength and domination, with consequent Darwinian resonance. Suffice it to say that the working classes and women end up at the bottom of the heap, a position often enforced by recourse to physical violence. Robert J. Neiss suggests that the prevailing Darwinism in such situations brings out the worst in female characters.³⁵

Relevant to our examination of the scope of Darwinian conflicts in the novels is the passage in which Jacques Lantier mulls over the right to kill, which is presented as 'le droit des forts que gênent les faibles, et qui les mangent' (*Bête* 1236). Although homicide is at the far end of the response of the strong to the weak, many of the conflicts turn on establishing physical supremacy, which is only separated from murder by a question of degree. Jacques attempts to balance his atavistic Darwinian urge (animality) with his learned morality (humanity). Neide de Faria extracts a general principle from this:

[L]a réflexion de Jacques, qui explique les conflits individuels comme un besoin vital, prend des proportions mythiques dans les pensées de Claude et d'Etienne, s'entendant à toutes sortes de luttes. Les conflits entre des individuels ou entre des classes sociales deviennent ainsi une 'concurrence biologique', 'la loi de la vie' inexorable d'un 'univers mangé-mangeur'.³⁶

³⁴ Ronnie Butler identifies 'la conviction zolienne de la loi du conflit inhérente à la nature' ('La Révolution française, point de départ des *Rougon-Macquart*', *CN*, 60 (1986), 89-104 p.95).

³⁵ 'Mais pour les autres ouvrières, les vendeuses des Halles et des Grands Magasins, les paysannes, les travailleuses parisiennes, la vie est envisagée - si l'on peut dire que ces pauvres femmes envisagent le monde d'une manière cohérente - comme une lutte individuelle et purement darwinienne, une simple lutte pour l'existence. [...] [O]n en vient à penser que c'est le caractère darwinien du monde des travailleurs, où la lutte pour l'existence prime tout, qui amène ce manque de solidarité' ('Emile Zola : la femme au travail', *CN*, 50 (1976), 40-58 pp.52-53).

³⁶ De Faria, p.260.

Struggles, battles and conflicts are characteristic of the cycle, which is not surprising, given Zola's interest in issues of power and control, and his predilection for putting forces into conflict with each other.³⁷ As we have seen, this prevailing atmosphere of combat is frequently described in Darwinian terminology or with military imagery. Whilst not aspiring to being exhaustive, this section will show the scope of struggles in the novels and identify the general Darwinian thrust which informs the series.³⁸ Although broad, the range of interpersonal struggles is presented consistently, in that many are expressed in Darwinian terms, or characterised by a recourse to simple physical force, frequently during a conflict between two male characters over a woman.

Etienne Lantier has already been referred to in this chapter, and here our interest is in his struggles as an individual, rather than his ideological concerns as a strike-leader. He is in conflict with Chaval for Catherine's affections, a struggle which draws to its violent conclusion during their imprisonment underground in the flooded mine. Catherine explains her staying with Chaval because 'il est le plus fort' (*Germinal* 1331), a status which he attempts to assert against Etienne as well. There is a history of provocation between them, making a resolution necessary. 'Maintenant, il fallait que l'un des deux mangeât l'autre' (1333). When Etienne kills his rival, the terminology used underlines both the Darwinian and bestial nature of their conflict echoing the passage in *Bête*.

Ses cheveux se dressaient devant l'horreur de ce meurtre, et malgré la révolte de son éducation, une allégresse faisait battre son cœur, la joie animale d'un appétit enfin satisfait. Il eut ensuite un orgueil, l'orgueil du plus fort. (*Germinal* 1572)

Terre is full of conflicts, both on the personal and ideological level. Françoise Naudin-Patriat identifies the antagonism between the weak and the strong as one of

³⁷ Gerhard Gerhardt identifies Zola's depiction of politics as a struggle between unequal forces: 'Politics remains, as always, a struggle for power; but in the early Zola it is an uneven struggle. It pits a lofty idealism against personal ambition, children against adults in *La Fortune des Rougon* and thin against fat in *Le Ventre de Paris*' ('Zola's biological vision of politics: revolutionary figures in *La Fortune des Rougon* and *Le Ventre de Paris*', *Nineteenth-Century French Studies*, 2 (1974), 164-180 p.176).

³⁸ Neide de Faria identifies the 'loi du plus fort' as one of the repeating structures in the cycle of novels. 'L'instinct de vie y est en même temps instinct de mort. Cette dualité cosmique, cette "loi de la vie" se manifeste fréquemment dans le cycle, sous des formes variées. [...] Elle se traduit bien des fois, au niveau explicite du texte, comme "la loi du plus fort" (De Faria, p.260).

the characteristics of rural life in the novel.³⁹ There is the animosity between Jean Macquart and Buteau over Françoise Fouan and her property. Following the men's physical fight with pieces of farmyard equipment (*Terre* 604-606), Jean and Françoise manage to trick Buteau and Lise at the auction, and the Buteau *ménage* seethes 'dans le désespoir sauvage de n'être pas les plus forts' (701).

Hourdequin's old retainer, the shepherd Soulas, nurses a long-term enmity against Jacqueline, a serving wench whose despotism knows no bounds now that she shares the farmer's bed. Soulas considers taking her down a peg or two by reporting the extent of Jacqueline's promiscuity to their master, but wonders whether 'la Cognette, même vendue, resterait la plus forte' (*Terre* 447).

Macqueron and Lengaigne, owners of the local cafés, compete for the business of the peasants and also vie to succeed Hourdequin as mayor. As members of the *conseil municipal*, however, they share the same attitude towards the government: 'ils étaient toujours du côté du manche, résolus à se donner au plus fort, au maître' (*Terre* 675).⁴⁰ This mention of 'maître' has an echo in *Débâcle* where the French Silvine laments her vulnerability at the hands of German spy Goliath, the father of her son.

De quel ton il avait fait savoir qu'il était le maître! D'ailleurs, c'était la vérité, il n'y avait plus de gendarmes, plus de juges à qui s'adresser, la force seule avait raison. Oh! être la plus forte, le prendre quand il viendrait, lui qui parlait de prendre les autres!⁴¹

The financier Aristide Saccard and the Attorney-General, Delcambre, come to fisticuffs over the baronne Sandorff. The primitive nature of their struggle is underlined by the response of the woman to the scene: 'les yeux obliques et sournois sur la bataille, en femelle que les mâles se disputent, et qui attend, pour être au vainqueur'.⁴² Another highly placed politician, the Minister of the Interior, Eugène

³⁹ 'Les faibles n'ont pas leur place dans le monde rural. L'ensemble des villageois acceptent et appliquent la règle qui refuse toute espèce de considération aux pauvres et aux dépossédés, d'où leur indifférence aux victimes' (Naudin-Patriat, p.36).

⁴⁰ *Terre* 675. The attitude of the peasantry towards the practice of the 'candidature officielle' will be discussed in Chapter Three.

⁴¹ *Débâcle* 827. The considerable implications of this statement for the legal system will be discussed in Chapter Three.

⁴² *Argent* 213. A similar scene occurs in *Nana*, where Rose Mignon watches her husband and Fauchery fighting over her, distracted to the point of missing her cue to go on stage: 'Mais Rose resta

Rougon, has a physical struggle *with* a woman, Clorinde Balbi, in a sultry stable-block.⁴³ These examples of apparently civilised individuals resorting to physical conflict seem to suggest just how close to the surface is the urge to protect oneself and one's position through recourse to a Darwinian display of physical strength.

Conflicts also occur within the family unit, where cliques oppose each other, as evidenced by the animosity between the Rougon and Macquart branches of Tante Dide's family. Such rivalry writ large can be seen in the factional struggles within a community, such as the Maigres and the Gras in *Ventre*, which also equates to the conflict between different political positions.⁴⁴ Zola has no difficulty extending his interpretation of Darwinism to these broader social confrontations.⁴⁵ For example, a class-based struggle is the essence of *Germinal*.⁴⁶ The tension between the forces of Capital and Labour in that novel is complemented by the presentation of different attitudes towards the redistribution of wealth in *Argent*.⁴⁷

stupéfaite, en voyant à ses pieds son mari et son amant qui se vautraient, s'étranglant, ruant' (*Nana* 1216). Octave Mouret and Auguste Vabre have a brief scuffle over Berthe - though rather than watching, the 'trophy' quits the scene: 'Pendant leur courte lutte, Berthe s'était enfuie en chemise par la porte restée grande ouverte' (*Pot-Bouille* 286). A variation on this is the struggle between the clerics Fenil and Faujas for the ear of the bishop. Reference is made to 'l'aisance toute féminine avec laquelle Mgr Rousselot changeait de maître et se livrait au plus fort' (*Conquête* 1020).

⁴³ *Excellence* 118-119. The language of Darwinism is used frequently by and about Rougon, particularly terms related to eating. Twice he refers to himself as 'trop gros' to be eaten by his enemies (226, 275).

⁴⁴ As Brian Nelson explains: 'Lisa's social and political attitudes, reflected in the concept of the eternal struggle between *les gras* and *les maigres*, are rooted in an explicit belief in the survival of the fittest. The bourgeoisie, in other words, justifies itself in terms of an implacable Darwinism' (Nelson, *Bourgeoisie*, p.16).

⁴⁵ As Jacques Pelletier observes: 'C'est que Zola a tendance à voir la lutte des classes comme une variante de la lutte biologique entre les espèces, des forts contre les faibles; sa conception de l'histoire, sauf peut-être à la fin de sa vie où il comprit toute l'importance des facteurs économiques dans l'histoire, conserve des relents darwiniens' ('Lukacs, lecteur de Zola', *CN*, 41 (1971), 58-74 p.71).

⁴⁶ Henri Guillemin's description of the strike shows the different levels at which the conflict occurs: 'La grève et ses violences, c'est tout simple, terriblement simple: c'est "le pauvre contre le riche: la faim contre la satiété"; et ceux qui sont les plus forts, les riches, parce qu'ils ont l'Etat avec eux, l'armée avec eux, ils l'emportent - la force restant maîtresse, laissant les ouvriers aplatis et muets de rage' (*Présentation des "Rougon-Macquart"* (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), pp.244-245).

⁴⁷ This issue is addressed specifically by the Marxist revolutionary Sigismond Busch who insists upon collectivism, not charity, as the way to redress economic inequalities. His view contrasts with the charity on a mind-blowing scale practised by the princesse d'Orviedo, who attempts to redress the damage done by the powerful to the vulnerable. Upon discovering the source of her late husband's vast fortune to be the exploitation of other people, she makes it her duty to provide sumptuous facilities for the impoverished and dispossessed members of society. 'C'était, d'ailleurs, toujours la même volonté de royale restitution, non pas le morceau de pain jeté par la pitié ou la peur aux misérables, mais la jouissance de vivre, le superflu, tout ce qui est bon et beau donné aux humbles qui n'ont rien, aux faibles que les forts ont volés leur part de joie' (*Argent* 362).

We have already seen the stage-managed conflict Octave Mouret choreographs within his department store. Mouret's calculated exploitation of his employees adds to the uncertainties of the employment market. Workers are obliged to accept the unfavourable conditions offered. Those with ambition and drive, in Mouret's own image, prosper in the Darwinian environment. For example, Favier ousts his superior Hutin just as Hutin saw off his own predecessor Robineau. On a broader scale, in relation to the smaller, specialist boutiques which he puts out of business, Octave Mouret and his department store represent 'le plus fort' in the modern commercial world.⁴⁸

We know that Zola, in a quest for accessibility, frequently uses characters to represent a point of view, so that more abstract ideological struggles, with their scope for big-scale impact, can be persuasively presented as focussed personal conflicts. For example, arguments between Hourdequin and M. Rochefontaine in *Terre* provide a pretext for explicit reference to the conflicting policies of protectionism and the free-market, a struggle with Darwinian overtones:

Tous deux, le cultivateur et l'usinier, le protectionniste et le libre-échangiste, se dévisagèrent, l'un avec le ricanement de sa bonhomie sournoise, l'autre avec la hardiesse franche de son hostilité. C'était l'état de guerre moderne, la bataille économique actuelle, sur le terrain de la lutte pour la vie. (*Terre* 680)

In *Argent* the competition between the two financiers also has a religious dimension, with the apparently Catholic Saccard doing battle for control of the financial markets with the Jewish Gundersmann.⁴⁹ The international scale of the conflict in the Franco-Prussian war is reduced to a personal level in the characters of twins Maurice and Henriette Levasseur and their cousin, Otto Gunther, an officer in the Prussian Army. The contrasts between Jean Macquart and Maurice are the cornerstone of the novel, representing *inter alia*, respectively, the Versaillais and the Communards in the struggle for Paris at the end of *Débâcle*, where their symbolic fraternity turns

⁴⁸ Machine and monster imagery is applied to the department store and its impact on other businesses in the neighbourhood. For example, present at Geneviève Baudu's funeral are '[t]outes les victimes du monstre' (*Bonheur* 740).

⁴⁹ The religious angle is presented in addition to the opposition between Saccard's innovative business practices which are driven by his passion and Gundersmann's traditional methods and his faith in logic dictating his attitude towards speculation and the money markets.

tragically to fratricide. Using the imagery of amputation of gangrenous limbs, Zola proceeds from this incident to an optimistic conclusion, as Jean, embodying 'la partie saine' moves into the future.⁵⁰

Darwinism in action : primitive communities

The preceding section focussed on aspects of the novels with Darwinian implications. This section moves beyond the anecdotal incident to extended depictions of a community organised along Darwinian lines. The two examples in *Les Rougon-Macquart* of primitive communities are the peasant farmers of Les Artaud (*Faute*) and the fishing village of Bonneville (*Joie*). Both communities are geographically isolated, and they are connected in neither space nor time to the France of the Second Empire, to which the other novels in the cycle (with the exception of *Rêve*) are explicitly linked.⁵¹

The inhabitants are Zola's characters who live closest to nature and farthest from the socialised urban environment.⁵² This might indicate characters closer to animals than humans, which is suggested by the prevalence of animal imagery in the description of the primitive communities.

⁵⁰ *Débâcle* 907. 'Sain' was identified earlier as one of the characteristics of the new 'plus fort' in *Les Rougon-Macquart*. Sandy Petrey underlines the irony of Maurice ('malsain') being charged with praising Jean ('sain') : 'Cette louange de la partie saine et raisonnable sort de la bouche de celui qui incarne la partie malsaine et déraisonnable' (CN 54 (1980), p.94).

⁵¹ For Pascale Krumm 'ces récits sont atemporels (et donc ahistoriques), l'action est elle aussi située dans un lieu atypique, quasi-utopique, confirmant l'aspect poétique et hors du monde contemporain' ('*Le Docteur Pascal* : un (dangereux) supplément? La problématique féminine dans le cycle zolien', CN, 73 (1999), 227-240 p.231). In the preparatory notes for *Faute* Zola's objective is seen to be the creation of a community which lives in isolation and in a timeless world. He refers to a 'groupe presque biblique' (RM I 1690). This is reflected in Serge Mouret's appraisal of Les Artaud as a 'poignée d'hommes recommençant les temps' (*Faute* 1309). Discussing the epic qualities of *Terre*, another novel in the cycle with an agricultural setting, the comments of Alfred C. Proulx on the primitive figure of the farmer seem equally applicable to Les Artaud: 'L'agriculteur prend place tout de suite après le chasseur et peut-être le berger dans la hiérarchie de l'évolution de la civilisation. Cette idée est centrale dans le roman, car les personnages paysans sont attachés à la terre d'une façon élémentaire et dans un sens très primitif, évoquant l'image des premiers fermiers de la préhistoire' (*Aspects épiques des 'Rougon-Macquart' de Zola* (The Hague and Paris: Mouton, 1966) p.169).

⁵² The novels also feature primitive individuals, such as Désirée Mouret (*Conquête* and *Faute*) and Marjolin (*Ventre*) whose animality is more clearly established. They exist, however, in isolation, and it is the social nature of the primitive communities which interests us here.

Both communities live in an unfriendly, even hostile, natural environment, upon which they are dependent for their livelihood.⁵³ Les Artaud is in a dry, rocky part of southern France.⁵⁴ The conditions are not conducive to agriculture and crop quality is low. The effort demanded is disproportionate to the resulting product. Home to about one hundred and fifty individuals, the village is made up of around thirty dwellings of various qualities.⁵⁵

The ironically named Bonneville is about the same size as Les Artaud, located on the Norman coast and constantly under threat of being eroded into the advancing sea.⁵⁶ As with the other village, Bonneville is an isolated community.⁵⁷ Like their southern farming counterparts, the Norman fisherfolk extract their livelihood at some cost from their environment.⁵⁸ In spite of adverse conditions, they persist in living in their perilous situation.⁵⁹

⁵³ Even the appearance of the village is menacing : 'l'horizon restait farouche' (*Faute* 1231).

⁵⁴ 'Le pays s'étendait à deux lieues, fermé par un mur de collines jaunes, que des bois de pins tachaient de noir; pays terrible aux landes séchées, aux arêtes rocheuses déchirant le sol. Les quelques coins de terre labourable étalaient des mares saignantes, des champs rouges, où s'alignaient des files d'amandiers maigres, des têtes grises d'olivier, des traînées des vignes, rayant la campagne de leurs souches brunes. On aurait dit qu'un immense incendie avait passé là, semant sur les hauteurs les cendres des forêts, brûlant les prairies, laissant son éclat et sa chaleur de fournaise dans les creux' (*Faute* 1230-1231). The fire imagery confirms the impression of dryness. The land is described as 'la plaine brûlée' (1257).

⁵⁵ 'Misérables maisons, faites de pierres sèches et de planches maçonnées, jetées le long d'un étroit chemin, sans rues indiquées. Elles étaient au nombre d'une trentaine, les unes tassées dans le fumier, noires de misère, les autres plus vastes, plus gaies, avec leurs tuiles roses' (*Faute* 1231).

⁵⁶ 'Cette route dévalait entre deux falaises, on aurait dit un coup de hache dans le roc, une fente qui avait laissé couler les quelques mètres de terre, où se trouvaient plantées les vingt-cinq à trente masures de Bonneville. Chaque marée semblait devoir les écraser contre la rampe, sur leur lit étroit de galets' (*Joie* 809).

⁵⁷ Bonneville is a 'village perdu' (*Joie* 834) and a 'trou perdu' (883). Les Artaud is also a 'village perdu' (*Faute* 1220) located some distance from a major road : 'à une lieue de toute route' (1218).

⁵⁸ 'Ils n'étaient pas deux cents habitants, ils vivaient de la mer, fort mal' (*Joie* 810). The novel presents a catalogue of boats lost at sea, accidents and shipwrecks.

⁵⁹ Chanteau, the bourgeois mayor of the area, does not understand why the fishing community does not relocate to a safer location further from the sea. "'Aussi,'" cria-t-il, "on n'a pas idée d'un village bâti aussi bêtement! Vous vous êtes fourrés sous les vagues, ma parole d'honneur! ce n'est pas étonnant si la mer avale vos maisons une à une ... Et, d'ailleurs, pourquoi restez-vous dans ce trou? On s'en va"' (*Joie* 829). In the wake of a severe storm, Lazare Chanteau shares his father's opinion: "'Qui les force à rester? Ils n'ont qu'à bâtir ailleurs ... On n'est vraiment pas si bête, de se coller ainsi sous les vagues!'" (*Joie* 1001-1002). From the vantage point of their house on the cliffs high above the village, the Chanteau family does not understand the villagers' peculiar, and perverse, attachment to the sea. The ambivalent attitude of the fisherfolk to the sea may be described as fearful admiration. Following a severe storm and serious damage, they retain 'une goguenardise féroce de matelots, fiers de leur mer aux gifles mortelles' (1015). To be noted is the dual impact of the sea on their lives - it is at one and the same time their livelihood and the single biggest threat to their existence.

The village of Les Artaud sprang up naturally in the harsh surroundings, adapting itself in the manner of the local vegetation to the prevailing conditions.⁶⁰ Marine imagery is used for the inhabitants of Bonneville, an appropriate counterpoint to the images of vegetation used for the arable farmers in the earlier novel.⁶¹ Animal imagery is also used to describe the primitives - the 'troupeau' image, so common in *Germinal* and *Débâcle*, is used frequently of Les Artaud, and members of the fishing community are often compared to specific animals.⁶² The primitives' animality is perceived by members of the clergy as a negative quality.⁶³

The characters resist the vestiges of external order which penetrate their otherwise self-regulating society, as seen in their rejection of attempted intervention by local government and organised religion. In both villages a church is the only non-residential structure.⁶⁴ Threats of recourse to the police and legal system are made on two occasions in *Joie* by the maid, Véronique, and by Lazare Chanteau, convinced that Pauline's charity cases are thieving from the household. Representatives of external repression do not, however, make an appearance in the novel.⁶⁵ Both

⁶⁰ 'Il songeait à ce village des Artaud, poussé là, dans les pierres, ainsi qu'une des végétations noueuses de la vallée' (*Faute* 1231). Frère Archangias also uses a vegetable simile: "'Voyez-vous, ces Artaud, c'est comme ces ronces qui mangent les rocs, ici. Il a suffi d'une souche pour que le pays fût empoisonné! Ça se cramponne, ça se multiplie, ça vit quand même. Il faudra le feu du ciel, comme à Gomorrhe, pour nettoyer ça'" (1237).

⁶¹ Their insistence at remaining in their compromised geographical position sees the inhabitants of Bonneville compared to stubborn marine life. They are 'collés à leur rocher avec un entêtement stupide de mollusques' (*Joie* 810), and 'comme une des végétations entêtées de la mer' (1048).

⁶² One clear example of this is the presentation of the Cuche boy. Pauline must place her offerings of food and money on the ground and retire, before the child lurches forward to snatch the goods and run away with them. His movements are described with animal imagery. For example, he jumps like a 'chèvre sauvage' (*Joie* 898-899), he has a 'dandinement de bête mauvaise et têtue' (1006), and 'une agilité de loup' (1114). His opportunistic raids are proof of his 'vivant en bête que la faim jette sur toutes les proies' (*ibid.*). Pauline's impression is that Cuche represents 'le dernier degré de la misère et de l'abjection, une telle déchéance humaine' (*ibid.*).

⁶³ Members of the clergy take a less generous view of the primitives' animality, seeing it as proof of godlessness. Frère Archangias places Les Artaud on the same level as their animals: "'Mais les Artaud se conduisent en bêtes, voyez-vous! Ils sont comme leurs chiens qui n'assistent pas à la messe, qui se moquent des commandements de Dieu et de l'Eglise'" (*Faute* 1237). He also remarks that: "'Les Artaud vivent comme leurs cochons'" (1238).

⁶⁴ For example, elsewhere in the cycle there is a reference to Les Artaud having to travel from their own community to a café run by one of Pascal's patients. 'Et Lafouasse, le cabaretier, faisait tout de même de petites affaires, grâce aux ouvriers du moulin et aux paysans qui apportaient leur blé. Il avait encore pour clients, le dimanche, les quelques habitants des Artaud, un hameau voisin' (*Pascal* 958). The attitude of the primitive communities to religion (namely disregard), and the attitude of the clergy to the primitive communities (namely contempt) fall beyond the scope of this chapter.

⁶⁵ The death of the fishing boat owner Gonin is considered suspicious, but the police do not intervene: 'On avait, en effet, trouvé un matin le vieil infirme mort dans son coffre à charbon; et il était si noir de coups, qu'un instant la police avait failli s'en mêler' (*Joie* 1116).

communities are self-sufficient and self-regulating, and it is clear that Darwinian principles inform (unconsciously) their social structures and *mores*.

There is a social hierarchy in Les Artaud and Bonneville, based on the ownership of property. Conflicts appear to arise principally in relation to property, and are resolved physically.⁶⁶ For example, in Bonneville, there are those who own their vessels and those who are obliged to work on other people's boats. We have already noted the different classes of accommodation in Les Artaud, and nor is the quality of land of uniform standard. Bambousse owns the best parcels of land available in Les Artaud, and this holding seems to guarantee his position as mayor. His ready temper and outbursts of violence, even against his own family, no doubt serve to confirm his situation. There is not, however, in either community, any evidence of *richesse oblige*.

Physical fitness appears to be the major criterion for survival in Bonneville. Not even a considerable property holding can protect one's dominant social position in the absence of physical strength to back it up. This is the case of Gonin. Owner of a boat, he becomes paralysed and is supplanted on both the conjugal couch and the bridge of the vessel by a local low-life, Cuche, who was previously Gonin's employee. Not content with merely cuckolding his former boss, Cuche beats Gonin and forces him to live in a trunk at the foot of the matrimonial bed from which position he can but witness his wife's new sexual relationship. The wife, who is Cuche's cousin, joins in the beatings.⁶⁷

In the primitive communities, free rein is given to instincts and selfish impulses.⁶⁸ It is each man for himself (the fisherfolk of Bonneville may be united against the

⁶⁶ An example is given of a primitive yet effective system for the protection of property rights. 'Et pourtant déjà, parmi eux, se trouvaient des pauvres et des riches. Des poules ayant disparu, les poulaillers, la nuit, étaient fermés par de gros cadenas; un Artaud avait tué un Artaud, un soir, derrière le moulin' (*Faute* 1232).

⁶⁷ Much is made in the earlier novel of the close family ties connecting the inhabitants of Les Artaud, who stem from the same ancestor, in a similar fashion to the Rougon, Macquart and Mouret families. A degree of intermarriage and incest is unavoidable in these closed communities. 'Ils se mariaient entre eux, dans une promiscuité éhontée; on ne citait pas un exemple d'un Artaud ayant amené une femme d'un village voisin; les filles seules s'en allaient parfois' (*Faute* 1231).

⁶⁸ This reflects the comments on the selfish aspects of (social) Darwinism, as seen in the introduction to this chapter. As Henri Guillemin observes in his discussion of *Faute*: 'Et si la leçon du livre est la

elements, but there is no proof of cooperation on any level - a suggestion of social Darwinism, perhaps?) and individuals are responsible for their own survival as no assistance can be expected from other members of the community. Pauline's charitable endeavours are exploited by those who would previously have been forced to fend for themselves in illegal and degrading ways. Not that the availability of financial and material support from Pauline has seen an end to the poaching and prostitution which appears rife in the village, and is exemplified in the activities of three generations of the Tourmal family.

Viewed from outside, these communities appear primitive, in a pejorative sense. The convent-educated Louise, in *Joie*, is horrified by the deprivation and depravity in Bonneville.

Louise eut un geste de révolte. Quel monde affreux! et son amie s'intéressait à ces horreurs! Était-ce possible que, si près d'une grande ville comme Caen, il existât des trous de pays, où les habitants vécussent de la sorte, en véritables sauvages? Car, enfin, il n'y avait que les sauvages pour offenser ainsi toutes les lois divines et humaines.⁶⁹

The use of the term 'sauvage' is worth underlining. What are these 'lois divines et humaines' against which the fisherfolk offend? Frère Archangias' allegations against Les Artaud are equally valid here, namely, the primitive characters breach many of the commandments and are not practising Catholics. Louise, the Chanteau family and the priest appear to consider the community irredeemable. Even the generous-spirited Pauline is concerned about the 'vice' and 'pourriture' in the community. Each of the families described in detail represents a particular vice.⁷⁰ They engage in illegal activities, and their relationships are characterised by incest, child abuse and promiscuity. These are not the noble savages of the class championed by Rousseau.

libération des instincts, en voici sous nos yeux, dès les Notes préalables, des êtres qui suivent la bonne route: ce sont les paysans des Artaud' (Guillemin, *Présentation*, p.79).

⁶⁹ *Joie* 899. After much of the village is wiped out, the term 'sauvage' is used again to describe the community: 'C'était un dénuement pitoyable, une promiscuité de sauvages, où femmes et enfants grouillaient dans la vermine et le vice' (1001). When the sea defences and the village itself are comprehensively destroyed in a storm, the fisherfolk 'dansaient comme des sauvages' (1112) on the beach.

⁷⁰ Henri Guillemin summarises it neatly: 'Prouane sera "l'ivrognerie", Gonin, "la colère", Cuhe, "la débauche", Tourmal, "la paresse", Houtelard, "l'avarice"' (Guillemin, *Présentation*, p.224). Zola's interest in the effects of heredity, Lamarck's theories, and the environment makes a brief appearance in *Joie* to the extent that the younger generation is seen to continue the family tradition.

The blatant absence of morality exhibited by the primitive characters is consistent with the amoral Darwinian principles along the lines of which these communities operate.

For our purposes, these two communities are examples of Darwinism in practice. Whilst no mention is made of Darwin and Zola's interpretation of his theories in these two texts, unlike in *Germinal* and *Débâcle*, the primitive characters are nevertheless unconscious practitioners of Darwinian principles. Their lives are a constant struggle, both against nature and amongst themselves. Physical strength and endurance are the keys to survival and status in these communities.

Furthermore, there is no resistance from the inhabitants of Bonneville and Les Artaud to the prevailing (Darwinian) environment in which they live. The characters complain about the ravages wreaked upon their cottages by the sea (nevertheless refusing to relocate their village) but they do not rail against perceived injustices in the way in which their society is organised. Perhaps they lack the imagination to perceive an alternative to their lifestyle. This passive acceptance of their lot in life is firstly an indicator of their stoicism (a concept associated with the enlightened Pascal Rougon, as we shall see in Chapter Five), and secondly a major point of contrast between them and the characters from *Germinal* discussed in the following chapter - who are aware of and who articulate their awareness of the injustice of their situation.

The ambiguity of Darwinism in *Les Rougon-Macquart*

We have seen how Zola makes frequent use of Darwinian imagery and vocabulary in *Les Rougon-Macquart*, and observed the range of conflicts in the novels which have a Darwinian quality. Even allowing for poetic licence in the interpretation of Darwin's theories, it is apparent that the presentation of Darwinism in the novels is ambiguous. Is a society structured along Darwinian lines acceptable? Zola, or at least the *discours indirect libre*, seems uncertain. He appears to veer between a wholesale acceptance of Darwinian principles and the construction of a modified form of them.

Central to the presentation of Darwinism in the novels is Maurice Levasseur to whom are attributed several reflections on the issue. Maurice, the bourgeois intellectual of *Débâcle*, affords Zola a pretext to discuss Darwinism. His incoherent statements of principle in the following passages, in what appears to be *discours indirect libre*, contain specific references to the issue.⁷¹

Maurice était pour la guerre, la croyait inévitable, nécessaire à l'existence même des nations. [...] Est-ce que la vie n'est pas une guerre de chaque seconde? est-ce que la condition même de la nature n'est pas le combat continu, la victoire du plus digne, la force entretenue et renouvelée par l'action, la vie renaissant toujours jeune de la mort? (*Débâcle* 408)

This passage is from the first chapter of the novel. The connection between Darwinism and nature is clearly expressed. Terms such as 'inévitabile' and 'nécessaire' underline the fatality of the condition. Nature is a given, the *ce qui est* of the world which must be accepted. The notion of conflict suggested by 'guerre', 'combat' and 'victoire' confirms the pattern of struggles seen elsewhere in the novels. Zola's interest in forces competing for supremacy is also suggested here, and extrapolated into the mythical domain by reference to the binary opposition between life and death which is a constant feature of *Les Rougon-Macquart*. The positive slant on war as suggested in this passage smacks of social Darwinism.⁷²

Mais, repris par sa science, Maurice songeait à la guerre nécessaire, la guerre qui est la vie même, la loi du monde. N'est-ce pas l'homme pitoyable qui a

⁷¹ It is hard to identify with certainty the line between *discours indirect libre* and thoughts attributed to the character. Maurice's status as something of an intellectual means that it is not impossible that he might phrase his thoughts in the unambiguous Darwinian terms used. In whichever case, it is clear that these passages can be ascribed either directly to Zola or to Maurice as his porte-parole. Robert J. Neiss categorises Maurice as representing 'un type que Zola en venait à détester, l'intellectuel compliqué et futile de la fin de l'Empire' (CN 54 (1980), p.64), but does not suggest that this detracts from the message Maurice is delivering in the novel. 'Et quand nous comparons les idées de Maurice sur le rôle de la lutte dans la vie humaine avec celles de Pascal Rougon, qui très évidemment est un porte-parole de Zola, nous voyons que celui-ci était souvent sur le point de justifier la guerre comme une manifestation de cette force vitale qui anime l'humanité et la fait agir, la force que lui, Zola, adorait, comme Darwin, lui-même, au-dessus de tout' (*ibid.* p.65).

⁷² According to Robert J. Neiss, for the social Darwinists, 'la guerre, malgré tout, fait une œuvre bonne et nécessaire' (CN 54 (1980), p.61). 'La guerre donc est bonne et inévitable dans un monde où la lutte pour la vie crée les règles de l'existence' (*ibid.*). Maurice adopts this view wholeheartedly in his delirious ramblings at the end of the novel. Sandy Petrey remarks that 'ce ne sont pas d'ordinaire les fous qui expliquent la valeur de la raison' and identifies 'deux éléments contradictoires dans *La Débâcle*, des paroles de Maurice et de la dénonciation textuelle de l'esprit détraqué qui les engendre' (CN 54 (1980), pp.94-95).

introduit l'idée de justice et de paix, lorsque l'impassible nature n'est qu'un continuel champ de massacre? 'S'entendre!' s'écria-t-il, 'oui! dans des siècles. Si tous les peuples ne formaient plus qu'un peuple, on pourrait concevoir à la rigueur l'avènement de cet âge d'or; et encore la fin de la guerre ne serait-elle pas la fin de l'humanité? ... J'étais imbécile tout à l'heure, il faut se battre, puisque c'est la loi.' (*Débâcle* 560)

This passage appears before the battle for Sedan. It repeats the notion of inevitability seen in the earlier passage quoted, and further qualifies nature as 'impassible', a term whose full significance will be revealed in Chapter Five. Important to notice is the use of potentially legal terminology in the repetition of 'loi' and the introduction of the key term 'justice'. Justice and nature (and therein Darwinism) are presented as incompatible. The reign of justice and the end of war is suggested to be the end of humanity, confirming the earlier connection made between the struggle for survival and the nature of life itself.

The operation of Darwinism in the novels is similar to that of the concept of the 'but ignoré', which is the focus of Chapter Five. Namely, an apparently amoral, or descriptive, force of nature appears to enforce a prescriptive, or morally loaded agenda. How does the amoral force of Darwinism become charged with a moral purpose? Through an alleviation, in two respects, of the logical effects of Darwinism, had it remained unmitigated. Firstly, compassion for the victims of Darwinism is apparent throughout the cycle, and is incarnated by the key group of female porte-parole characters, whose function will be examined in Chapter Five. Secondly, the procession of upbeat and optimistic endings as the cycle draws to its conclusion.

The concern for the victims of social change is seen in the earlier novels of the cycle. Those characters who are not among 'les plus forts', such as the Republican insurgents (*Fortune*) are presented sympathetically as the victims of poor leadership and a disproportionately violent repression by the forces of law and order. In *Bonheur* Denise pities those who have suffered as the department store transformed retailing, and in *Argent* Mme Caroline sympathises with those who have been ruined by the collapse of the Banque Universelle.⁷³

⁷³ Brian Nelson suggests that Mme Caroline was never convinced by Saccard's analogy between speculation and copulation, and that she did not share his quasi-Darwinian vision of society: 'Mme

Both women perceive the work of their lovers Mouret and Saccard to be part of the movement towards a new order, and they recognise that their compassion for the innocent or misguided victims of such change must not affect their confidence in and commitment to the new order.⁷⁴ It nevertheless behoves them to highlight the collateral damage of such progress, and in both novels a catalogue of victims is presented. The female porte-parole characters find the immediate price of such conflict repugnant, though they have the imagination and faith to look beyond the immediate sacrifices to the glories of the new age.⁷⁵

The texts underline that the way forward, towards the 'but ignoré' of a new social order, demands sacrifice. In the closing pages of *Débâcle*, the novel in which Darwinism is so clearly connected to nature, the moribund Maurice applauds the war and the Commune which, in their purifying destruction, he considers to have worked to rid France of its corruption.

Mais le bain de sang était nécessaire, et de sang français, l'abominable holocauste, le sacrifice vivant, au milieu du feu purificateur. Désormais, le calvaire était monté jusqu'à la plus terrifiante des agonies, la nation crucifiée expiait ses fautes et allait renaître. (*Débâcle* 907)

The result of the logical application of Darwinian principles to the conflict between France and Prussia is expressed in religious imagery ('holocauste', 'sacrifice', 'calvaire', 'crucifiée', 'expiait' and 'fautes'). This passage is, however, infused with optimism ('purificateur' and 'renaître') in spite of the catalogue of bloody imagery which characterises the Darwinian process. To make a positive connection between

Caroline's reaction to Saccard's eloquent protestations is ambivalent : she is attracted by his vitality but remains unmoved by his Darwinian theories' (Nelson, *Bourgeoisie*, p.179).

⁷⁴ Denise's sympathy is demonstrated by 'le flot de larmes qui la soulevait, devant la misère sacrée des vaincus' (*Bonheur* 761) but she recognises nevertheless 'cette nécessité de la mort engraisant le monde, cette lutte pour la vie qui faisait pousser les êtres sur le charnier de l'éternelle destruction' (747).

⁷⁵ We shall deal with this issue in more detail in Chapter Five. Guy Robert judges Zola a little too harshly in his suggestion that the author spares no thought for Mouret's victims. The connection he makes, however, between Mouret and his era, is an important one. 'Mouret marche avec son époque. Le secret de sa réussite est tout entier dans leur accord; il utilise les procédés du commerce moderne : roulement rapide des capitaux qui rend possible l'abaissement des prix, publicité bruyante qui suscite de nouveaux besoins dans la clientèle. Nous assistons au triomphe complet du capitalisme, sans que le romancier paraisse s'émouvoir ici des ruines qu'il peut semer sur sa route' (*Emile Zola : principes et caractères généraux de son œuvre* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1952, p.77).

the results of that process and optimism is to alleviate, at least to some degree, the full force of that Darwinian process. The pattern of positive endings in the late *Rougon-Macquart* novels is discussed in more detail in Chapter Five. Suffice it to say for the moment that Zola's utopianism becomes ever more clear as the cycle draws to its close. We can glimpse a reborn France, freed from the corrupting influence of the Second Empire, and looking towards a positive future with characters such as the female porte-parole characters at the vanguard.

So, we can see already that the brakes have been applied to the full force of Darwinism, and that it is being cast as a positive movement, not simply because of its attachment to nature (whose eternity and logic are valued in the novels) but also as it seems to be the tool for taking society into a new order. The amoral is becoming morally loaded. Furthermore, there are two significant references which appear to detract from the neutral presentation of the Darwinian universe in the novels, and thus from the logical coherence of the force's operation. The first is from *Argent*, where Saccard is steeling himself for his titanic struggle with Gundermann:

Dans ces batailles de l'argent, sourdes et lâches, où l'on éventre les faibles, sans bruit, il n'y a plus de liens, plus de parenté, plus d'amitié : c'est l'atroce loi des forts, ceux qui mangent pour ne pas être mangés. Aussi se sentait-il absolument seul, n'ayant d'autre soutien que son insatiable appétit, qui le tenait debout, sans cesse dévorant. (*Argent* 316)

The second appears in *Débâcle*, at the death of lieutenant Rochas:

Il vécut encore une minute, les yeux élargis, voyant peut-être monter à l'horizon la vision vraie de la guerre, l'atroce lutte vitale qu'il ne faut accepter que d'un cœur résigné et grave, ainsi qu'une loi.⁷⁶

That such a strong adjective as 'atroce' is mentioned twice is important. Whilst it could be seen as a simple description of Darwinism, a description which perhaps suggests compassion for the victims, 'atroce' also has the quality of the unacceptable

⁷⁶ *Débâcle* 704. Discussing this passage in the novel, Alfred C. Proulx contests Zola's application of Darwin's theory to war. 'Zola essaye d'introduire la guerre et sa nécessité spécieuse dans le domaine des forces apparentées à celles de l'évolution naturelle. Dans son ébauche pour *La Débâcle* nous notons ces intentions : "...je fais redresser la vision vraie de la guerre abominable, la nécessité de la lutte vitale, toute l'idée haute et navrante de Darwin dominant le pauvre petit, un insecte écrasé dans les nécessités de l'énorme et sombre nature"' (Proulx, *Aspects épiques*, p.163).

or the untenable about it. We think that it can be argued that there is a gap here where a vaguely enunciated demand for something else, justice for example, can be seen to enter the equation. Awareness of the 'vision vraie de la guerre' (namely that the price the unalleviated forces of Darwinism extract is too high) requires that an alternative to the 'atroce loi des forts' must be sought. Acceptance with resignation is not enough. A confident and happy commitment to the advent of a new social order, in keeping with the exemplary Pascal Rougon's faith in 'la vie', is demanded.

This is not the only example in the cycle where the operation of a force of (or for) progress is moderated. In *Bonheur* and *Argent* the creative and innovative, yet reckless and damaging, business practices of Octave Mouret and Aristide Saccard are tempered by the socially-minded and humanitarian intervention of Denise Baudu and Mme Caroline respectively.⁷⁷ Angus Wilson observes how this combination of influences reflects Zola's stab at reconciling these two logically conflicting views:

He even attempts, in the unsatisfactory Christian Socialist ending of *Au Bonheur des Dames*, to resolve the contradiction between his belief in the survival of the fittest with his hatred of cut-throat morality.⁷⁸

This apparently illogical solution to the conflict between the amoral Darwinism and a moral objective could be seen to stem from Zola's swithering between the two dominant strands of social Darwinism. Robert J. Neiss splits the movement into the optimistic believers who had faith in a 'progrès inévitable vers le bien, vers un but inconnu mais élevé' (CN 54 (1980), p.61) and the pessimists, principally those with religious ideas, who considered that unfettered social Darwinism could be an evolution towards either a positive or a negative goal. He suggests that Zola probably moved from the latter group towards the former with *Pascal* where optimism appears to set in. Chapter Five's discussion of the 'but ignoré' will show just how closely

⁷⁷ Brian Nelson views Zola's explicit approval of both Mouret and Saccard as 'connected with Zola's attempt in *Au Bonheur des Dames* and *L'Argent* to reconcile his Darwinian views of life with a need for responsible social leadership' (Nelson, *Bourgeoisie*, p.27).

⁷⁸ *Emile Zola : An introductory study of his novels* (New York: William Morrow, 1952), p.35. Brian Nelson sees a conflict between Zola's Darwinian views and his scientific positivism: 'An element of ambiguity arises from the contrast between Zola's positivist ideology, which leads to an optimistic vision of a well-ordered society based on science, and his detailed observation of the anarchic nature of a society based on the survival of the fittest. Zola's scientific faith, in other words, is at odds with his Darwinian view of humanity' (Nelson, *Bourgeoisie*, p.24). Nelson's interest is in establishing Zola's preference for a social change led by scientifically-literate members of the bourgeoisie.

Neiss' description of the optimistic social Darwinists can apply to Zola. As Neiss observes:

Mais avant tout, si Zola ressemble non seulement aux social-darwinistes mais à Darwin lui-même, c'est par sa foi profonde en la vie humaine vue comme lutte, mais aussi comme poussée en avant, comme lente progression vers un monde meilleur.⁷⁹

Can the optimism which we have seen injected into the later novels in the cycle smooth over the ravages of an 'atroce' Darwinism? It is not a rejection of Darwinian principles, but more of a reworking of their operation towards the promise of a Good Ending, which would make the price to pay a worthwhile sacrifice. Can the use of the aforementioned optimistic strand of social Darwinism (Darwinism Lite, perhaps?) permit Zola to square the circle - let Darwinism operate with the cachet of a natural force and all the credibility which it implies, but infuse it with a moral edge, by restricting its operation to leading towards a positive end - where there is health, happiness, equality and justice (in short, an approximation of the 'but ignoré')? There are no guarantees as to the end result, just as with the 'but ignoré', and a leap of faith may be in order, a gamble on the new order being an improvement on the prevailing 'atroce' Darwinism.

What are the implications for justice in the Darwinian universe of *Les Rougon-Macquart*? Darwinism, social or otherwise, is a world view which, when not interfered with, logically excludes notions of justice. We have seen how justice and nature (to which Darwinism has been explicitly linked) are incompatible, but there seems to be a residual demand for justice, or, at the very least, a poorly formulated awareness of the absence of justice. Fissures of the sort seen in the manipulation of Darwinism in the novels are promising openings for justice, either through a promise of future justice (such as is contained in the potential of the 'but ignoré', or the optimistic strand of social Darwinism) if the compromised Darwinian force runs its course, or through a wholesale alternative.

⁷⁹ CN, 54 (1980), p. 66.

It seems that the operation of an apparently justice-denying Darwinism in the novels does not shut the door on justice. We have seen how the rigours of Darwinism appear to be tamed by the concern for the victims and the stubborn optimism of the novels' conclusions. In addition to the alleviation of the full force of Darwinism, an option for counteracting Darwinism altogether appears to be suggested in one of Maurice's ruminations on the issue.

N'est-ce pas l'homme pitoyable qui a introduit l'idée de justice et de paix, lorsque l'impassable nature n'est qu'un continuel champ de massacre? (*Débâcle* 560)

He refers, albeit disparagingly, to an alternative to the Darwinian struggle for existence : justice. His intellectualised *idée fixe* does not permit him to see beyond the prevailing Darwinism, so he views justice as the refuge of the 'pitoyable', of those who could not stand the heat of the Darwinian kitchen. We can count J.-J. Rousseau and Zola's *discours indirect libre* among this denigrated class, believing as they do that if might equates with right, justice is an irrelevant concept, which, for them, is an unacceptable position.⁸⁰

Justice as an alternative to Darwinism is also alluded to in *Bête* where Jacques Lantier tries to override what is perceived as his atavistic 'droit au meurtre' by applying 'des scrupules qu'on avait inventés plus tard, pour vivre ensemble' (*Bête* 1236). As he approaches Roubaud with homicidal intent, Jacques persuades himself that a right to kill, based on some rationalised Darwinian scenario, cannot justify the elimination of his rival simply because his continued existence makes Jacques' life difficult.

Non, non! il ne tuerait point, il ne pouvait tuer ainsi cet homme sans défense. Le raisonnement ne ferait jamais le meurtre, il fallait l'instinct de mordre, le saut qui jette sur la proie, la faim ou la passion qui la déchire. Qu'importait si la conscience n'était faite que des idées transmises par une lente hérédité de justice! Il ne se sentait pas le droit de tuer, et il avait beau faire, il n'arrivait pas à se persuader qu'il pouvait le prendre. (*Bête* 1241)

Whilst the logical extension of the Darwinian 'loi des plus forts' is tempered by an acquired notion of justice, note that Jacques (or, more likely, the *discours indirect*

⁸⁰ 'Convenons donc que force ne fait pas droit, et qu'on n'est obligé d'obéir qu'aux puissances légitimes' (*Du Contrat Social*, Livre I, chapitre iii).

libre) does reserve the possibility of crimes of passion, explained by instinct rather than some atavistic spin on Darwinism.

Similarly, an acquired notion of justice, or perhaps some fundamental sense of morality, gives la Maheude in *Germinal* a belief that the inequalities engendered by Darwinism may be overcome. Her wishful thinking applies Darwinian language to the anti-Darwinian notion of justice or right. “Quand on a le bon droit de son côté [...] on finit toujours par être les plus forts” (*Germinal* 1329-1330). As shall be seen in Chapter Two, justice becomes an alternative religion for the striking miners, and its advent is expressed in similar terms to the idea of reward in the next life as compensation for the inequalities of this one.

Souvarine’s reference to Darwin as ‘cet apôtre de l’inégalité’ (*Germinal* 1524) is echoed in *Pascal* where Clotilde also suggests that, as nature does not provide a level playing field, no equality is possible between individuals:

‘Si encore l’égalité et la justice existaient dans ta nature. Mais tu le reconnais toi-même, la vie est au plus fort, le faible périt fatalement, parce qu’il est faible. Il n’y a pas deux êtres égaux, ni en santé, ni en beauté, ni en intelligence : c’est au petit bonheur de la rencontre, au hasard du choix ... Et tout croule, dès que la grande et sainte justice n’est plus!’ (*Pascal* 993)

Her dissatisfaction with the injustice of a Darwinian nature contrasts with her association of justice with the divine. She uses the terminology of Darwinism to denounce it.⁸¹ Pascal, one of the author’s chief porte-paroles in the cycle, is determined to find the answers in nature, to which he is committed, and which he considers a more credible repository for justice, happiness and understanding than any of the man-made alternatives on offer. He agrees with Clotilde about the absence of equality (which is a key principle of Darwinism) but is unwilling to deny the possibility of justice in nature.

‘C’est vrai,’ dit-il à demi-voix, comme à lui-même, ‘l’égalité n’existe pas. Une société qu’on baserait sur elle, ne pourrait vivre. Pendant des siècles, on a cru

⁸¹ “Alors, n’est-ce pas?” cria-t-elle, “la justice qui écrase l’individu pour le bonheur de la race, qui détruit l’espèce affaiblie pour l’engraissement de l’espèce triomphante ... Non, non! c’est le crime! Il n’y a qu’ordure et que meurtre” (*Pascal* 993). There is a Darwinian resonance in words such as ‘espèce’ and ‘engraissement’.

remédier au mal par la charité. Mais le monde a craqué; et, aujourd'hui, on propose la justice ... La nature est-elle juste? Je la crois plutôt logique. La logique est peut-être une justice naturelle et supérieure, allant droit à la somme du travail commun, au grand labeur final.' (*Pascal* 993)

Pascal confirms what we have seen already - that nature and justice appear irreconcilable. He acknowledges the calls for justice, and strains to implicate nature as the ultimate source of justice, through suggesting its operation as a logical force. We shall examine Pascal's efforts in more detail in Chapter Five.

It might be a question of defining a different sort of justice, a justice found in an arbitrary injustice, unconvincing as that may seem to the victims of the apparent injustice, unable to see the bigger picture. The 'supérieure' places it above whatever pale man-made imitations may exist. It also suggests a quasi-divine state, beyond human comprehension and enunciation - the ways of this superhuman justice may be misty, and only partially revealed, even to initiates.

Pascal's statement is particularly relevant to the concept of the 'but ignoré' which is discussed in Chapter Five. It introduces a fruitful parallel between the 'grand labeur final' (which equates to the 'but ignoré' or whatever term is used to describe this vague end or purpose towards which a movement is being made in the later novels of *Les Rougon-Macquart*) and the end result of the Darwinian struggle, in its modified form, as mentioned earlier.

Both represent an inexorable and mysterious movement towards 'bonheur universel' and other associated positive goals of Zola's utopianism. Both the Darwinian refinement of the species and the natural path to the 'but ignoré' are morally loaded movements masquerading as forces of nature, leading towards a not-too-distant state which is described in terms such as 'juste' and 'supérieur' and contains 'justice'.

Pascal hints at the possibility of justice through nature rather than in nature. When the amoral force of nature operates in a prescriptive or moral fashion, namely towards a goal, the connection with justice is clear. Be it the positive slant to Darwinism or the movement towards the 'but ignoré', the path offered is that which leads to a more

general, abstract ideal of justice. If justice is to be found anywhere, it is in this middle-distance. By neither scenario is immediate and practical justice delivered. The best offer is the potential of a new, just, world order. This long-term project becomes more apparent as *Les Rougon-Macquart* proceed to their conclusion, as the focus shifts from reality towards a distant and ethereal utopia.

The ambiguity and confusion which stem from the presentation of Darwinism in the novels is due to the impossible objective of attempting to impose a moral agenda on a natural force, which is, by definition, amoral. Zola wants to depict Darwinism as a logical, scientifically credible natural force which supports his ideological, and morally loaded, objective of a movement towards an improved new order. The gaps which appear in this flawed logic, not least of all the stated absence of justice, blow the whole structure wide open, and suggest, amongst other things, that Zola wanted to create room for justice of some order, some alternative to the 'atrocious' survival of the fittest.

Not all characters in the novels, however, exhibit Pascal's insight and commitment to a long-term goal. Nor do they share the primitive communities' acceptance of a Darwinian universe and consequent lack of interest in a notion of justice. Unable to see beyond the inequalities and injustices they perceive in the natural world (as enunciated by Clotilde in the reference above), and which, for them, are reflected in society, various groups of characters fight for justice, and look for it beyond nature. The following chapters will examine the alternatives which are considered as responses to the prevailing Darwinism and its apparent injustice.

CHAPTER TWO

JUSTICE DEMANDED : *GERMINAL*

Oui, un cri de pitié, un cri de justice, je ne veux pas davantage.
Emile Zola, on his intentions for *Germinal*¹

In the previous chapter we saw justice proposed as an alternative to the prevailing Darwinian universe in *Les Rougon-Macquart*. Suggested by Maurice Levasseur and implied by Jacques Lantier, the notion of justice is seized on by other characters in the cycle as a way out of their situations of powerlessness or vulnerability, in a society ruled by 'le plus fort'. This chapter will examine one of the most explicit and extended pleas for justice in the novels, that of the miners of Montsou in *Germinal*, a novel which furthermore goes on to hint at the legal system as a possible source of justice.

Darwinism and justice in *Germinal*

We will start by establishing the Darwinian nature of the prevailing atmosphere in the novel, before identifying the sort of justice demanded by the characters, and then examining the role justice appears to play as an alternative to (traditional) religion, a function which is suggested by the use of religious imagery and vocabulary.

¹ 'Eh bien! Soyez donc satisfait, je puis répéter ce que j'ai déjà dit : *Germinal* est une œuvre de pitié et non une œuvre de révolution. Oui, un cri de pitié, un cri de justice, je ne veux pas davantage' *Correspondence* t.V (1884-1885), p.347 (11 décembre 1885).

The struggle between the miners (Labour) and the Company (Capital) in *Germinal* can easily be seen as a Darwinian encounter. As we saw in Chapter One, the text is full of Darwinian terminology, such as 'le plus fort', just in case the reader did not see the situation's Darwinian potential. The miners certainly perceive their strike as an assault by the powerless on the strong. Their banding together, firstly as a community, and secondly as part of the international trades union movement, appears to counteract their initial weakness.² Furthermore, they believe that they have right on their side, which should balance might. In fact, it is their attempt to make this so which interests us here, given its implications for justice in general, which surely has the same objective.

We all know that the strike failed, at considerable cost to both the miners - as symbolised by the decimation of the Maheu family - and the Company. The latter was financially damaged by the strike and worried, like the bourgeoisie, about the social repercussions of the episode. The Darwinian set-up in the industrial sector has been challenged, and emerges shaken. Zola permits the striking miners a pivotal role on the hinge between the old and the new order - things will never be the same again after the industrial action at Montsou. Zola suggests that they are a catalyst for change.³ The text underlines how the strike, albeit unsuccessful, marks the first step towards a new social order, and one of the characteristics of that social order appears to be justice.⁴

As we shall see in Chapter Four, in our discussion of the revolutionary characters in *Les Rougon-Macquart*, one characteristic of the revolutionary platforms in the various novels is a call for justice. Evidently the ranks of revolutionaries are comprised of

² The notion of strength of numbers is discussed in Chapter Three. The numbers argument, however, seems to be a variant on a Darwinian show of strength. In any case, the strength in *Germinal* lies elsewhere. The miners outnumber the mine owners by a factor of thousands - yet still Capital dominates Travail.

³ 'La grève des charbonniers de Montsou, née de la crise industrielle qui empirait depuis deux ans, l'avait accrue, en précipitant la débâcle' (*Germinal* 1461).

⁴ Discussing the strike as part of an epic struggle, Alfred C. Proulx remarks : 'L'échec de l'essai, tel qu'il est, semble indiquer l'impossibilité d'un changement significatif ou, du moins, fait ressortir la distance entre ce qui est et ce qu'on voudrait qui soit. Mais l'essai lui-même est présenté comme un pas solide vers ce qui sera peut-être une longue série de pas sur ce chemin qui aboutit finalement à des changements valables. Dans l'échec présent il existe une foi et un espoir de future victoire, une victoire gagnée en partie par l'effort présent' (*Aspects épiques des "Rougon-Macquart" de Zola*, (The Hague and Paris: Mouton, 1966), p.167).

those who are dissatisfied with the status quo, and they frame their demands for a new order in terms of establishing justice.⁵ In *Germinal*, a call for justice is Etienne Lantier's catch-cry, and it is this element which the miners retain from his convoluted and confused revolutionary ramblings.⁶ It becomes a receptacle for the miners' own interpretation of what justice entails. As we shall see, both parties envisage something which could be broadly termed social justice, and in this their interests coincide with Zola's.⁷

Etienne Lantier will be discussed as a revolutionary character in Chapter Four. Suffice it to say that he is tainted by personal ambition and by a lack of a common sense revolutionary programme, two characteristics associated with this group of characters. Here our interest is in his concept of justice. The social justice espoused by Etienne seems to take the form of a radical and utopian socialism. Influenced by the instinct towards revolt identified in his fellow miners, Etienne starts to analyse the basis for his dissatisfaction with the status quo.⁸ Hindered by his ignorance, he dares not discuss those issues which are important to him, namely: 'l'égalité de tous les hommes, l'équité qui voulait un partage entre eux des biens de la terre' (*Germinal* 1274). The terms 'égalité' and 'équité' suggest justice and fairness. Etienne seems to aspire to an equal distribution of the world's resources. There is a distinct class-consciousness to his socialism, which becomes clear when he defends his commitment to justice:

'Vois-tu, moi, pour la justice je donnerais tout, la boisson et les filles. Il n'y a qu'une chose qui me chauffe le cœur, c'est l'idée que nous allons balayer les bourgeois.'⁹

⁵ The extent to which their 'spin' on justice is self-serving forms part of the discussion in the following chapters.

⁶ For example, during Etienne's speech in the woods: 'La foule, à ce mot de justice, secouée d'un long frisson, éclata en applaudissements [...] "Justice! ... Il est temps, justice!"' (*Germinal* 1378).

⁷ As Jacques Pelletier observes: 'Zola renonce à son attitude habituelle d'impassibilité et prend vigoureusement parti pour les grévistes en lutte, pour la justice sociale' ('Zola évangéliste', *CN*, 48 (1974), 205-214 p.208).

⁸ 'Jusque-là, il n'avait eu que la révolte de l'instinct, au milieu de la sourde fermentation des camarades. Toutes sortes de questions confuses se posaient à lui: pourquoi la misère des uns? pourquoi la richesse des autres? pourquoi ceux-ci sous le talon de ceux-là, sans l'espoir de jamais prendre leur place?' (*Germinal* 1274). This can be interpreted as a challenge to the Darwinian status quo.

⁹ *Germinal* 1272. He does not mention his personal ambition, which fast becomes a principal incentive. The sacrifices he is prepared to make - alcohol and sex - are the only forms of relief available to the average miner, so Etienne's forsaking of them makes an impression on his colleagues.

This class angle is again apparent in his attempt to persuade the army to join in on the miners' side against the bourgeois oppressors. He hopes that the soldiers can be persuaded to fight for their social origins rather than for their paymasters.¹⁰ This is unsuccessful - the soldiers ultimately open fire on the defenceless striking miners. This class-consciousness informs Etienne's attitude towards justice, which he seems to define socially. For him, justice is conditional upon replacing the current social order.

[U]n espoir que le jour se lèverait sur l'extermination du vieux monde, plus une fortune debout, le niveau égalitaire passé comme une faux, au ras du sol.¹¹

There are suggestions in the novel that justice is something which can actively be brought about. This, in spite of the early vision the Maheus create from Etienne's speeches where 'la justice descendait du ciel' which locates its derivation beyond the human realm.¹² For example, during the speech in the woods, as the miners decide to continue their strike: 'C'était trop cette fois, le temps venait où les misérables, poussés à bout, feraient justice' (*Germinal* 1378). This is paralleled in the collective decision to persuade the miners at Jean-Bart to join the strikers from Montsou, all the better, they believe, to bring the struggle to its logical, and just, conclusion. 'C'était le coup de folie de la foi, l'impatience d'une secte religieuse, qui, lasse d'espérer le miracle attendu, se décidait à le provoquer enfin' (1385). Furthermore, there is the idea that justice is something to which one has a right, and which can be demanded: 'L'injustice devenait trop grande, ils finiraient par exiger leur droit, puisqu'on leur retirait le pain de la bouche' (1292).

¹⁰ 'En deux heures, ils seraient balayés, exterminés, avec les jouissances et les abominations de leur vie inique. Déjà, l'on disait que des régiments entiers se trouvaient infectés de socialisme. Était-ce vrai? la justice allait-elle venir, grâce aux cartouches distribuées par la bourgeoisie?' (*Germinal* 1464). Note the use of 'balayer' in both this passage and the one quoted in the text above. The 'jouissances' and 'abominations' ascribed to the bourgeoisie are echoed elsewhere, for example: 'la bourgeoisie épuisée de jouissance' (1589). We see a similar view from the delirious Maurice where the 'peuple nouveau' (*Débâcle* 876) will surge forth from the catastrophe which has destroyed 'cette vieille société gâtée d'abominable justice' (875).

¹¹ *Germinal* 1462. It seems inconsistent that Etienne should rail against Souvarine's anarchic nihilism, when he envisages his own objective being similarly achieved. 'Extermination' is a strong word, and the image of a scythe is a violent one.

¹² *Germinal* 1278. The notion of divine justice is implied in the abbé Ranvier's outbursts against the bourgeoisie, and is famously used by Clotilde in *Pascal* in opposition to the apparent unfairness of life on earth, as we saw in Chapter One.

A further interesting point in the novel is Etienne's vision of the new order of men, the 'harvest' from underground of 'une armée d'hommes qui rétabliraient la justice'.¹³ The 'rétabliraient' is very significant. Firstly because it suggests that justice is a lost, but previously existing state, and secondly because it ties in with the other hints in the novel that the justice sought by Etienne and the miners is of a retributive nature - that it is their turn to be in charge, their turn to wrest back what was previously theirs.

Their objective does not appear to be an equal distribution of the world's resources, rather that they shall dominate the new social order, thereby avenging their current dominated position. For example, the miners are stirred by Etienne's speech in the forest and are described as : 'tout un rut de peuple, les hommes, les femmes, les enfants, affamés et lâchés au juste pillage de l'antique bien dont on les dépossédait' (*Germinal* 1380). '[J]uste' is used to qualify the radical upheaval envisaged, and which appears justified on the basis of a past exploitation suggested by 'dépossédait'. Etienne concludes his speech with a rousing: "'Notre tour est venu [...] C'est à nous d'avoir le pouvoir et la richesse!'" (*ibid.*), reflecting the attitude of the miners' wives upon seeing the Hennebeau maid being sent, by carriage, to lay in luxurious supplies. Influenced by Etienne's ideas, the women are convinced that 'le tour du pauvre monde viendrait' (1292). During the hardships of the strike, the miners derive comfort from the dream of taking charge : 'Quel rêve! être les maîtres, cesser de souffrir, jouir enfin!' (1380).

As mentioned above, the miners (like Etienne, if it comes to that) do not understand the intricacies of Etienne's hotch-potch of revolutionary discourses. What they do relate to is the idea of justice. This notion is principally enunciated in the novel by Maheu and la Maheude. That they support Etienne is important, as they are respected members of the Montsou mining community. Maheu, for example, is head of the delegation sent by the miners to negotiate with M. Hennebeau, to whom he puts the

¹³ *Germinal* 1277. The passage continues : 'Est-ce que tous les citoyens n'étaient pas égaux depuis la Révolution? puisqu'on votait ensemble, est-ce que l'ouvrier devait rester l'esclave du patron qui le payait?' Once again, the justice in question is linked to equality between the social classes.

case simply : “[C]’est à vous de voir si vous êtes pour la justice et pour le travail” (*Germinal* 1321).

La Maheude is a little like Françoise Fouan (*Terre*), with a strong belief in justice, or at least a strong revulsion for injustice. She brings a degree of common sense to bear on Etienne’s early optimism before becoming, if anything, more committed to the cause than Etienne himself.

Et ce qui la passionnait, ce qui la mettait d’accord avec le jeune homme, c’était l’idée de la justice. [...] ‘Moi, quand une affaire est juste, je me ferais hacher ... Et, vrai! ce serait juste, de jouer à notre tour!’¹⁴

La Maheude is frequently associated with the words ‘justice’ and ‘injustice’ in the text.¹⁵ On la Maheude and her support for the strike, Françoise Naudin-Patriat comments:

[S]i elle approuve la grève, c’est qu’elle y voit la seule manière d’obtenir justice. Par contre, les idées politiques lui paraissent dangereuses et totalement étrangères aux problèmes quotidiens.¹⁶

She is persuaded by la Levaque that she can no longer fairly obstruct the marriage of her son to the other woman’s daughter.¹⁷ It is made clear that her quest for justice requires her to override her instinct simply to take all that life throws at her. We see this in the concern she shares with Maheu about the delegation to M. Hennebeau:

¹⁴ *Germinal* 1279. Discussing the hardships of a miner’s life, with the long hours of back-breaking physical work for little pay, the culture of debt and the poverty engendered by supporting a large family with meagre financial resources, la Maheude says: “L’embêtant, voyez-vous, c’est lorsqu’on se dit que ça ne peut pas changer... Quand on est jeune, on s’imagine que le bonheur viendra, on espère des choses; et puis, la misère recommence toujours, on reste enfermé là-dedans ... Moi, je ne veux du mal à personne, mais il y a des fois où cette injustice me révolte” (*Germinal* 1276).

¹⁵ According to Etienne Brunet’s concordance, *Le Vocabulaire de Zola* (Geneva and Paris : Slatkine-Champion, 1985), the word ‘justice’ appears 224 times in *Les Rougon-Macquart*. In only four novels does the word appear more than twenty times : *Argent* (20), *Germinal* (32), *Terre* (34) and *Bête* (35). The frequency in *Argent* and *Bête* is easily explained by the legal background to both those texts, and the operation of the so-called ‘la justice’, whereas it seems that the high frequency in the other two novels is explained principally by the notions of justice of Françoise Fouan and la Maheude.

¹⁶ *Ténèbres et lumière de l’argent. La représentation de l’ordre social dans “Les Rougon-Macquart”* (Dijon: Université de Dijon, 1981), p.236. Note that this is the opposite of Etienne’s situation. He loses sight of the real issues and becomes tied up in the vagaries of different revolutionary ideas, with a view to involvement in politics.

¹⁷ La Maheude is ‘désolée de perdre le gain de son aîné, mais vaincue par cette raison qu’elle ne pouvait le garder davantage sans injustice’ (*Germinal* 1269).

Tous deux, au moment d'agir, malgré l'injustice de leur misère, retombaient à la résignation de la race, tremblant devant le lendemain, préférant encore plier l'échine. (*Germinal* 1317)

Her commitment to continuing the strike, in spite of the hunger and misery it engenders, is expressed in terms of justice.¹⁸ Her notion of justice takes on an extreme quality when the issue of strike-breaking is raised, and in her determination to see that the meeting in the forest take place.¹⁹ Whilst she attempts to put the brakes on her fellow strikers as they damage the mine and its equipment,²⁰ she becomes an active participant in the attack on Maigrat and in the post mortem castration of the grocer. Her idea(l) of justice is shattered when the cost of the strike to her family becomes apparent, and she laments: “‘Est-ce possible, de s’être rendu si malheureux à vouloir la justice!’” (*Germinal* 1517). She cannot believe that Etienne is recommending a return to work.

On the morning of Etienne's departure, they meet at the mine, and the *discours indirect libre* attributes some philosophical reflections to la Maheude:

Et, dans sa résignation séculaire, dans cette hérédité de discipline qui la courbait de nouveau, un travail s'était ainsi fait, la certitude que l'injustice ne pouvait durer davantage, et que, s'il n'y avait plus de bon Dieu il en repousserait un autre, pour venger les misérables. (*Germinal* 1586)

This last passage shows the close link between justice and religion which we will discuss in more detail in the next section. Note for the time being how the idea of revenge is made explicit here. In spite of everything, a core of confidence remains in the mining community, symbolised here by la Maheude, and observed by the departing Etienne:

Il comprit parfaitement, elle avait au fond des yeux sa croyance tranquille. A bientôt, et cette fois, ce serait le grand coup.²¹

¹⁸ ‘A cette heure, elle était pour la grève, raisonnablement. Il aurait mieux valu forcer la Compagnie à être juste, sans quitter le travail. Mais, puisqu'on l'avait quitté, on devait ne pas le reprendre, avant d'obtenir justice. Là-dessus, elle se montrait d'une énergie intraitable’ (*Germinal* 1330).

¹⁹ ‘La Maheude eut un geste énergique. “Nous irons tous! Ça finira, ces injustices et ces trahisures!”’ (*Germinal* 1362).

²⁰ ‘Elle était la plus calme, on pouvait exiger son droit, sans faire du dégât chez le monde’ (*Germinal* 1413).

²¹ *Germinal* 1587-1588. Note the religious connotation of ‘croyance’.

What can we make of this quiet air of confidence ('tranquille') which contrasts with the febrile displays of faith seen earlier in the novel? A degree of despondency was doubtless introduced by the failure of the strike, and perhaps pricked the miners' emotional balloon, but the issue of time-frame is perhaps also relevant. The notion of 'if not now, then soon' was introduced earlier in the novel during the argument between Rasseneur, Souvarine and Etienne about the best way to proceed.

Les enfants verraient sûrement cela, si les vieux ne le voyaient pas, car le siècle ne pouvait s'achever sans qu'il y eût une autre révolution, celle des ouvriers cette fois, un chambardement qui nettoierait la société du haut en bas, et qui la rebâtirait avec plus de propreté et de justice. (*Germinal* 1256)

References elsewhere in the novel to the Mexican campaign and the foundation of the *Internationale* situate the action about 1866, according to Henri Mitterand.²² So the thirty-five year period envisaged here before the turn of the century is relatively short term. Note the 'chambardement' which suggests a violent upheaval, a foretaste of which is given in the miners' rampage through Montsou. The new order is specifically connected with justice and the ambiguous 'propreté'. It could mean public health and hygiene measures, and there is considerable scope for improved living conditions for miners. But there is also a whiff of ethical purity to it, a moral quality to be defined by those in control after the change in social order.

Justice as an alternative (to?) religion

In *Germinal* justice is presented both as an alternative religion, and as an alternative to religion.²³ The notion of Etienne as an apostle (or even messiah) and the miners as his disciples is made very clear in the novel.²⁴ The use of religious vocabulary and imagery helps to establish this connection, which also leads to a spirit of optimism in

²² RM III p.1882.

²³ Robert H. McCormick Jr remarks on the 'spiritualisme exalté' and the 'langage utopique' in Zola's presentation of socialism. 'Dans l'esprit de Zola, comme dans celui de maints d'autres de son époque, le socialisme se lie étroitement à la religion' ('Zola et les "Notes Guesde"', *CN*, 69 (1995), 181-195 p.185).

²⁴ An extreme example is the attitude of la Mouquette to Etienne, her part-time lover: 'cette fille qui l'adorait comme un Jésus' (*Germinal* 1366).

the novel, as seen in the miners' faith in a better and more equitable future, and their confidence in the advent of the promised land.

As we shall see in Chapter Four's discussion of revolutionary characters, Etienne is tainted by self-interest and ambition, and many of the miners' statements are uttered in periods of hallucination and desperation engendered by the starvation and misery of the strike.²⁵ Their reponses are attributed to 'le coup de folie de la foi' - which suggests the dangers of extremism. This point is made simply to distance their statements from those made by some of the more balanced representatives of faith and optimism who appear elsewhere in *Les Rougon-Macquart*, and in Chapter Five of this thesis.

Etienne's reading of various revolutionary and socialist works inspires him with the fervour of the newly converted, which he attempts to transmit to the miners. 'Il avait la propagande obstinée des nouveaux convertis, qui se créent une mission'.²⁶ During the meeting in the woods, Etienne is 'l'apôtre apportant la vérité' (*Germinal* 1378). He sees himself - or is seen by the *discours indirect libre* - as a man with a mission, though in calmer moments ('à certaines heures de bon sens') he doubts his ability to rise to the necessary task: 'une inquiétude sur sa mission, la peur de n'être point l'homme attendu' (1328). When Rasseneur takes him to task over his plans, Etienne's faith slumps:

Il se raillait de ses illusions de néophyte, de son rêve religieux d'une cité où la justice allait régner bientôt, entre les hommes devenus frères. (*Germinal* 1339)

The presentation of the miners as Etienne's followers occurs on not only the literal level but also on the spiritual. They rally to his call for a strike, and buy into the promise he makes them of a just society. The miners are 'croyants' (*Germinal* 1328) and 'nouveaux croyants' (1279), members of a 'secte religieuse' (1385) who sign up

²⁵ For example, the miners are referred to as 'ces hallucinés de la misère'. 'Ils revoyaient là-bas, quand leurs yeux se troublaient de faiblesse, la cité idéale de leur rêve, mais prochaine à cette heure et comme réelle, avec son peuple de frères, son âge d'or de travail et de repas en commun.' Likewise the miners are swept along by: 'un demi-vertige, l'extase d'une vie meilleure qui jetait les martyrs aux bêtes'. Their belief is a substitute for sustenance: 'Cette foi remplaçait le pain et chauffait le ventre,' (all *Germinal* 1328). Reference is also made to their 'têtes, vidées par la famine' (1385).

²⁶ *Germinal* 1264. 'Dans les conversations du soir, il rendait des oracles' (1328).

with the other 'fidèles' (1348) to the *Internationale*.²⁷ They have a 'foi' (1328) and a 'conviction' (1328), as well as belief that 'un miracle les sauverait' (1328) and that the 'apothéose' (1385) of the new order is upon them. They fall prey to an 'exaltation religieuse' (1380) in their 'fièvre d'espoir' (*ibid.*).²⁸ There are explicit references to the early Church where the miners are described as 'pareils à ces chrétiens des premiers temps de l'Eglise' (1279) and they share the 'fièvre d'espoir des premiers chrétiens de l'Eglise' (1380). The idea of a forbidden faith is suggested by the need for secrecy surrounding the miners' strike meetings, reflecting the illegality of public meetings under the Second Empire.²⁹

Etienne cashes in on the miners' dissatisfaction with traditional religion. He presents socialism as an obvious alternative, and does so with religious imagery and terminology. He converts the miners of Montsou to his utopian socialism.³⁰ He starts with the Maheu family:

'Est-ce que vous avez besoin d'un bon Dieu et de son paradis pour être heureux? est-ce que vous ne pouvez pas vous faire à vous-mêmes le bonheur sur la terre?' [...] Puisque le bon Dieu était mort, la justice allait assurer le bonheur des hommes, en faisant régner l'égalité et la fraternité.' (*Germinal* 1278)

Justice will, according to Etienne, fill the spiritual void created by the absence of God in the world. He seems to offer them an opening to take control of their own destiny, promising something in this life, now, rather than a speculative better next world.³¹

²⁷ Pluchart's comments on the membership of the *Internationale* confirm this religious parallel: 'Jamais religion naissante n'avait fait tant de fidèles' (*Germinal* 1348).

²⁸ As Henri Mitterand observes: 'Sous l'effet des paroles d'Etienne, devenu tout à la fois le militant, l'apôtre et le guide, une sorte de foi religieuse, de confiance mystique dans l'approche du miracle révolutionnaire, pénètre les consciences' ('*Germinal* et les idéologies', *CN*, 42 (1971), 141-152 p.145).

²⁹ As part of the package of reforms which started the transformation from the authoritarian Empire to the liberal one, Napoléon III relaxed the *loi des associations*. 'Au début de 1868 furent votées les lois promises sur la liberté de la presse et la liberté des réunions qui vont changer complètement le caractère du régime' (Georges Pradalié, *Le Second Empire* (Paris: PUF, 1969), p.43).

³⁰ Philip Walker identifies a pattern of conversion in Zola's fiction. 'Dès *Les Rougon-Macquart*, on constate que Zola exploite déjà ces thèmes, en particulier celui de la conversion - par exemple la conversion de Pauline Quenu par son cousin Lazare 'au grand saint Schopenhauer' dans *La Joie de vivre*; ou la conversion des mineurs de Montsou au socialisme utopique d'Etienne, dans *Germinal*; ou la conversion de Clotilde aux articles de foi de Pascal: Vie, Science, Travail, Progrès, dans *Le Docteur Pascal*' ('Zola et la crise religieuse', in *Miscellanées Mitterand*, pp.261-268, p.263).

³¹ Françoise Naudin-Patriat underlines this idea. 'Etienne Lantier, quant à lui, rejette ces idées d'égalité promises pour un avenir hypothétique. Au lieu d'attendre le bonheur du Bon Dieu et de son paradis, pourquoi ne pas le construire soi-même sur la terre? A la promesse d'une justice pour plus tard, il substitue le rêve d'une justice sur terre, plus proche et accessible' (Naudin-Patriat, p.276).

Etienne and his confused version of socialism become the receptacle into which the desperate miners pour their faith.

Et les Maheu avaient l'air de comprendre, approuvaient, acceptaient les solutions miraculeuses, avec la foi aveugle des nouveaux croyants, pareils à ces chrétiens des premiers temps de l'Eglise, qui attendaient la venue d'une société parfaite, sur le fumier du monde antique. (*Germinal* 1279)

The unreality of their expectations is clear from 'miraculeuses', 'foi aveugle' and 'société parfaite'.³² Elsewhere in the novel, the miners' image of the new order is expressed in terms related to fantasy, such as 'féerie', 'songes', 'rêve' and 'impossible' (*Germinal* 1278). As befits a fantasy, there is no practical upshot from these dreams, or at least nothing definite in the immediate short-term. As Henri Mitterand describes it:

Aucune rationalisation, donc, du mouvement de revendication et de lutte pour la transformation de la société. Aucune visée politique précise, aucune stratégie. Seules la lassitude, l'attente mystique, puis l'impatience, l'exaspération, et de nouveau l'espoir du miracle.³³

Justice would not present itself as an alternative religion if traditional religion were not an apparently bankrupt institution for the miners.³⁴ There are two representatives of the clergy in the novel. Neither of them has an appreciation of the realities of life for the miners. The inhabitants of Montsou treat them both with a vestigial respect for an authority figure, albeit one in whom they have no confidence.

Le curé de Montsou, l'abbé Joire, passait en retroussant sa soutane, avec des délicatesses de gros chat bien nourri, qui craint de mouiller sa robe. Il était doux, il affectait de ne s'occuper de rien, pour ne fâcher ni les ouvriers ni les patrons. (*Germinal* 1209)

The hands-off indifference of Joire is contrasted with the political commitment of abbé Ranvier. What is interesting is the parallel which Zola establishes between Ranvier and Etienne. They both espouse the same message, namely that the epoch of

³² A similar construction is used later in the novel: 'C'était quand même une confiance absolue, une foi religieuse, le don aveugle d'une population de croyants. Puisqu'on leur avait promis l'ère de la justice, ils étaient prêts à souffrir pour la conquête du bonheur universel' (*Germinal* 1327).

³³ CN, 42 (1971), p. 146.

³⁴ As la Maheude says: 'Encore si ce que les curés racontent était vrai, si les pauvres gens de ce monde étaient riches dans l'autre!' (*Germinal* 1277).

justice is nigh. Ravier presents his message in a similar fashion, his 'ardeur d'un missionnaire qui prêche des sauvages, pour la gloire de sa religion' (*Germinal* 1472) reflecting Etienne's delivery. The only real difference is that Ravier keeps God in the picture.³⁵

Il disait que l'Eglise était avec les pauvres, qu'elle ferait un jour triompher la justice, en appelant la colère de Dieu sur les iniquités des riches. Et ce jour lui viendrait bientôt, car les riches avaient pris la place de Dieu, en étant arrivés à gouverner sans Dieu, dans leur vol impie du pouvoir. Mais, si les ouvriers voulaient le juste partage des biens de la terre, ils devaient s'en remettre tout de suite aux mains des prêtres, comme à la mort de Jésus les petits et les humbles s'étaient groupés autour des apôtres. Quelle force aurait le pape, de quelle armée disposerait le clergé, lorsqu'il commanderait à la foule innombrable des travailleurs! En une semaine, on purgerait le monde des méchants, on chasserait les maîtres indignes, ce serait enfin le vrai règne de Dieu, chacun récompensé selon ses mérites, la loi du travail réglant le bonheur universel.³⁶

Ravier's God is as class-conscious as he is. The implications of this 'religion engagée' are clear : political and social upheaval through a combination of divine intervention and violent class struggle. The justice offered here is associated with equality and the end to 'iniquité'. Both Ravier and Etienne present a quick-fix solution, a utopia (described by one of Zola's key expressions - 'bonheur universel' - which connects to the 'but ignoré' as we will see in Chapter Five) which they have little chance of delivering. That Ravier's solution involves violence is suggested by the image of an army and the verbs 'purger' and 'chasser'. The objective expressed here is, however, perhaps closer to equality ('le juste partage des biens de la terre') than the retributive justice Etienne proposes.

It seems that the miners have an outright choice of which dream to buy into. They choose the one in which they seem to have a more active role in controlling their

³⁵ La Maheude makes the connection between the two visionaries : 'La Maheude, qui l'écoutait, croyait entendre Etienne, aux veillées de l'automne, lorsqu'il leur annonçait la fin de leurs maux. Seulement, elle s'était toujours méfiée des soutanes' (1473). Perhaps it is the residual mistrust of the religious establishment which further pushes the miners towards Etienne's version of the future. As Françoise Naudin-Patriat observes : 'Les mineurs, cependant, - comme les petits paysans - ne sont sensibles ni aux arguments des prêtres ni à la philosophie religieuse' (Naudin-Patriat, p.276).

³⁶ *Germinal* 1472-1473. Françoise Naudin-Patriat considers Ravier exceptional amongst the clergy in *Les Rougon-Macquart*, as he 'attaque violemment le comportement de la bourgeoisie, au nom de l'Eglise qu'il range au côté des pauvres, pour le rétablissement de la justice' (Naudin-Patriat, p.196). Note how this connects to the 'rétabliraient' discussed earlier in the chapter. The reference to the 'loi du travail' appears to have echoes in *Pascal* where the eponymous hero's philosophy includes an imperative towards work and effort, as we shall see in Chapter Five. It looks in this case as though the 'travail' referred to is perhaps that which is usually rendered with a capital 'T'.

destiny, the option without the angle of traditional religion. Zola's anticlerical stance perhaps creeps into his depiction of Ranvier, even if the priest is 'on message' with the socialism and his comments about the ecclesiastical hierarchy.³⁷ Zola makes Ranvier share the negative characteristics of other revolutionary characters in the novels.³⁸ After the death of some of the miners during the confrontation with the soldiers, Ranvier appears and, in a scene with considerable apocalyptic potential, lets forth a dramatic tirade:

[L]es deux bras en l'air, dans une fureur de prophète, [il] appelait sur les assassins la colère de Dieu. Il annonçait l'ère de justice, la prochaine extermination de la bourgeoisie par le feu du ciel, puisqu'elle mettait le comble à ses crimes en faisant massacrer les travailleurs et les déshérités de ce monde.³⁹

Evidently he poses a considerable risk to the established order, and the bourgeois of Montsou have him removed. His departure adds to the merriment at Hennebeau Mansions as the bourgeois characters gather to celebrate the end of the strike.⁴⁰

Considerable detail has been presented on the miners and Etienne in this chapter because, like other revolutionary characters in the cycle, they utter some of the relatively rare explicit enunciations on the theme of justice. The contradictions and confusions we have seen as to the nature of justice envisaged - namely, is their justice a form of social revenge in which the formerly oppressed become the oppressors, or a

³⁷ Ranvier establishes a contrast between country priests and their connection to the 'people' and the corrupt politicised creatures of the bourgeoisie which are the urban clergy. 'Maintenant, en phrases voilées, il frappait sur les curés des villes, sur les évêques, sur le haut clergé, repu de jouissance, gorgé de domination, pactisant avec la bourgeoisie libérale, dans l'imbécillité de son aveuglement, sans voir que c'était cette bourgeoisie qui le dépossédait de l'empire du monde' (*Germinal* 1473). We can see this dark, politicised side of the Church in *Conquête* and *Pot-Bouille*.

³⁸ This 'révolutionnaire de l'Evangile' (*Germinal* 1473) shares in the revolutionaries' characteristic lack of practical solutions to material problems. To Maheu's comment that bread is more useful than empty words, Ranvier replies with a vague: "'Dieu pourvoira à tout!'" (*ibid.*). He is described as 'ayant pour les faits un tel dédain, qu'il courait ainsi les corons, sans aumônes, les mains vides au travers de cette armée mourante de faim' (1473-1474). Philip Walker describes Ranvier's lack of awareness thus: 'He is indifferent to the darkness, the cold, the empty larder. He also fails to grasp the realities of his own situation, to perceive how tight the Church's alliance was with the propertied classes and how utterly alienated the proletariat was from Christianity' ("*Germinal*" and *Zola's philosophical and religious thought* (Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 1984), p.8).

³⁹ *Germinal* 1511. The term 'extermination' is also used of Etienne's revolutionary vision (1462).

⁴⁰ 'M. Hennebeau lut une lettre de l'évêque, où celui-ci annonçait le déplacement de l'abbé Ranvier. Toute la bourgeoisie de la province commentait avec passion l'histoire de ce prêtre, qui traitait les soldats d'assassins' (*Germinal* 1522). This is not the first time in *Les Rougon-Macquart* where a priest is moved for political reasons. Serge Mouret's predecessor, the abbé Caffin is sidelined into Les Artaud after a sex scandal (*Faute*). In *Conquête*, abbé Faujas is transferred to the town as an agent of the government.

real equality which is closer to a more abstract idea of justice - illustrate the capacity of the concept to take on a range of meanings, and to stand for whatever a particular group of characters consider it should.

At least we can be certain of two things. The first is that *Germinal* goes some distance towards establishing that justice of some kind (social? retributive?) might operate as an alternative to Darwinism. Whether or not their social justice is in fact a different kind of Darwinism is unclear. It seems that they may have right on their side, but the miners are competing nevertheless to represent might. In general terms, social justice does have the potential to redress the injustices of a Darwinian universe, but the social justice envisaged by Etienne and the miners in *Germinal* has a distinctly retributive quality, and any possible practical application is undermined by the religious parallels which remove the reign of justice into a dream world.

The second is that the formulations of the new order which appear in *Germinal* find a parallel in the all-important concept of the 'but ignoré', which we will discuss in detail in Chapter Five. Although there is scant direct reference to it in *Les Rougon-Macquart* it has a central role in the philosophy of Pascal Rougon, and is a shorthand way of referring to the new order towards which characters in the later part of the cycle move with optimism. Much elsewhere in the texts points towards it, and that includes the new social order envisaged in *Germinal* by Etienne and the miners.

Some of the formulations used in the novel are either precisely those seen elsewhere in the cycle or close approximations of descriptions of the 'but ignoré'.⁴¹ These include: 'bonheur universel' (*Germinal* 1327, 1385, 1473), 'vie meilleure' (1328), 'âge d'or' (1328), 'société parfaite' (1279) and explicit connections with justice such as 'le règne prochain de la justice' (1380), 'l'édifice de vérité et de justice' (*ibid.*) and 'réveil de vérité et de justice' (1591).

What is important is the connection made, either explicitly or by implication, between this new social order and the concept of justice. For it shall be argued strenuously that

⁴¹ A reference to the 'fumier du monde antique' (*Germinal* 1279) evokes other examples of the manure imagery used later in the cycle, which we associate in Chapter Five with the 'but ignoré'.

the 'but ignoré' is the sole credible repository of justice in *Les Rougon-Macquart*. Before we reach that position, however, there are some other alternatives to consider. The first are the man-made sources of justice, which are the legal system and the new order towards which the revolutionary characters strive, which are the focus of the next two chapters.

CHAPTER THREE

JUSTICE DENIED I : THE LEGAL SYSTEM

'It won't do to have truth and justice on his side; he must have law and lawyers,' exclaims the old girl, apparently persuaded that the latter form a separate establishment, and have dissolved partnership with truth and justice for ever and a day.

Charles Dickens *Bleak House* (chapter LV)

The legal system as an alternative to Darwinism

Amongst the clear demands in *Germinal* for a new social order informed by a general notion of justice, there are two passages in the novel which hint that the legal system might provide a workable alternative to Darwinism. During the three-way debate between Etienne, Rasseneur and Souvarine over the best approach to the strike, they agree that the current state of affairs between Capital and Travail is untenable.

Non, d'une façon ou d'une autre, il fallait en finir, que ce fût gentiment, par des lois, par une entente de bonne amitié, ou que ce fût en sauvages, en brûlant tout et en se mangeant les uns les autres. Les enfants verraient sûrement cela, si les vieux ne le voyaient pas, car le siècle ne pouvait s'achever sans qu'il y eût une autre révolution, celle des ouvriers cette fois, un chambardement qui nettoierait la société du haut en bas, et qui la rebâtirait avec plus de propreté et de justice. (*Germinal* 1256)

Note that there appears to be a choice between a legal solution and a violent power struggle. Whichever form it takes, the revolution is expected to lead to justice. As we saw earlier, the Darwinian implications are clear in the 'mangeant', and a legal solution ('par des lois') is presented as an alternative to that form of dispute

resolution. Perhaps the ‘chambardement’ is to do with the ‘sauvages’ whilst the ‘rebâtirait’ and the ‘entente de bonne amitié’ are connected to the legal solution?

In the closing pages of the novel, as he leaves Montsou, Etienne reflects that:

Cela valait bien la peine de galoper à trois mille, en une bande dévastatrice! Vaguement, il devinait que la légalité, un jour, pouvait être plus terrible. Sa raison mûrissait, il avait jeté la gourme de ses rancunes. Oui, la Maheude le disait bien avec son bon sens, ce serait le grand coup : s’enrégimenter tranquillement, se connaître, se réunir en syndicats, lorsque les lois le permettraient; puis, le matin où l’on se sentirait les coudes, où l’on se trouverait des millions de travailleurs en face de quelques milliers de fainéants, prendre le pouvoir, être les maîtres. Ah! quel réveil de vérité et de justice! (*Germinal* 1590-1591)

Darwinian overtones are equally apparent here. The use of ‘maître’ and recourse to the numbers argument (millions v. milliers) suggest a power struggle of the sort which characterises the Darwinian universe in the novels, as we saw in Chapter One. Once more there is the explicit identification of ‘justice’ and ‘vérité’ featuring in the new social order. It should be noted, however, that there is some ambiguity in Etienne’s expectations of what the legal system will represent. There is a suggestion that the legal system will somehow make their might equal right - that once the legal system is changed to allow the workers to unite together (‘lorsque les lois le permettraient’) then the oppressed masses, by dint of their superior population, will somehow commandeer the legal system from their current masters and thereby ‘prendre le pouvoir, être les maîtres’. This suggests a reversal in the Darwinian pecking order, rather than an alternative to Darwinism. Under this interpretation, the ‘terrible’ could attach as a warning to the current dominant social class - that when the new social order springs forth, things will be worse for them, exceeding that which was wrought on them by the ‘bande dévastatrice’.

On the level of vocabulary at least, however, the legal solution is presented as a possible alternative to Darwinism. Law reform was to occur in the latter years of the Second Empire, as we mentioned earlier, permitting trades unions and the expression of opposition to the regime.¹ Note how Etienne has become more calm, and how he

¹ ‘Napoléon, however, was responsible for new initiatives which were meant to identify the regime’s sympathies with working people more overtly. The most important was the law of 25 May 1864

approves of la Maheude's 'bon sens' which, it could be said, prefigures the sensible level-headedness of the female porte-parole characters to be seen in Chapter Five.

The transition suggested here is less violent than the earlier formulation, and a well-organised response is contrasted with the desperate and short-term approach seen in the miners' industrial action in *Germinal*. Perhaps the suggestion is of an evolutionary rather than a revolutionary process? Both passages suggest a medium-term time-frame, in the first passage it is the duration of a generation, and in the second, the preparation for the 'grand coup' appears to be a matter of years rather than decades.² Whatever the case, it is clear from these two passages that the legal system is perceived, however vaguely, as a way of securing a permanent challenge to the prevailing Darwinism in the world of *Les Rougon-Macquart*. There is a perceptible call for a world where right rather than might is the determining feature.

Elsewhere in the cycle of novels, however, are more explicit references to the legal system as an alternative to Darwinism. We saw one example in the previous chapter, from the scene in *Débâcle* where Silvine laments the effective suspension of the legal system during wartime, and the implications that has for her protection against her former lover, the Prussian spy Goliath.

De quel ton il avait fait savoir qu'il était le maître! D'ailleurs, c'était la vérité, il n'y avait plus de gendarmes, plus de juges à qui s'adresser, la force seule avait raison. Oh! être la plus forte, le prendre quand il viendrait, lui qui parlait de prendre les autres! (*Débâcle* 827)

The case for establishing the legal system as an alternative to Darwinism could scarcely be put more plainly. That the legal system operates as an alternative to Darwinism is not welcomed by all characters. The brutal Buteau in *Terre* seems to prefer the idea of arranging his affairs without interference from an external order. To

(piloted through the Legislative Body by Emile Ollivier) which legalised strikes (but not trade unions)' (James F. McMillan, *Napoléon III* (London and New York: Longman, 1991), p.142). McMillan describes another change to the Code which Napoléon III made in 1868 - that in the event of an industrial dispute there would no longer be the presumption that the employer's word should always be accepted over that of the employee. A pensions package which the Emperor attempted to introduce was blocked by the Conseil d'Etat (*ibid.*, pp.142-143).

² It is essentially on this issue of time-frame that the new order seen in *Germinal* differs from the 'but ignoré' which shall be discussed in the last chapter.

Jean Macquart's threat of legal action to recover his property which Buteau seized, Buteau responds:

'L'huissier et les gendarmes, on les envoie chier! Il n'y a que les crapules qui ont besoin d'eux. Quand on est honnête, on règle ses comptes soi-même.'
(*Terre* 776)

Buteau's intense physicality goes some distance towards explaining his attitude. He is very much the master in his domain, and uses violence to achieve his own ends (he kills both his parents and is an accessory to the murder of his sister-in-law) and has already engaged in physical combat with Jean over Françoise. As we shall see later, he has a somewhat confused attitude towards the legal system, fearing its application on the grounds that it will compromise his control of his world.

The texts contain examples where characters have recourse to the legal system in a bid to protect their rights against stronger opposition. That they see the law being about rights (rather than Darwinian might) is relevant. Equally, it must be said, there are examples where strong characters use the legal system to ensure their continued dominion over the weak. This includes the ideological use of the legal system which will be examined later in the chapter. For the time being, however, our interest is in identifying the motivation of characters who threaten to or who actually use the legal system. What are their objectives, and what are their expectations of the legal system? For our purposes, recourse to the legal system includes not only legal action, but also the calling in of the police, threats of denunciation and so forth.

The first point to make is that most of the threats of legal action are not followed through. In many cases, the simple fact of the threat is enough, which indicates that the legal system exists, for most of the characters, as a frightening and punitive force. It is also worth noting that the majority of threats are made by characters of higher social classes - suggesting that recourse to the legal system is a class-based attitude, whereas the more primitive and less sophisticated characters share Buteau's preference for sorting out matters themselves, in a Darwinian way.

There are instances where a character has recourse to the legal system to protect their reputation. There are also several examples of a curious, connected phenomenon, where characters who are themselves being pursued or apprehended by the police threaten law suits against their captors. Protection of reputation or simply a sound strategic move? Whichever, it does not work. In *Nana*, a prostitute who is caught with a client during a police raid, pretends that they are, in fact, a married couple, and threatens to sue the police for harassment.³ A kleptomaniacal countess caught shoplifting in *Bonheur* pleads and cries before threatening legal action against the store's security forces.⁴ More obvious examples of the protection of one's reputation include that of the upwardly mobile Nana who uses legal threats to keep her former clients out of her new life.⁵ She goes on to persuade Muffat not to embark on legal action over his wife's adultery, pointing out that the subsequent publicity will ruin his reputation.⁶ In *Argent*, it is saving the reputation of the family name which forces Mme de Beauvilliers to give in to Busch's threat of legal action to recover a sum of money promised by her husband, the late comte de Beauvilliers, to a young servant he seduced whilst she was a minor.⁷ A variation on this is seen in *Pot-Bouille* where the socially aspirational concierge M. Gourd, protecting the good reputation of the apartment block, threatens an unmarried woman tenant with the police if she does not move out at once, albeit that she is in the advanced stages of pregnancy.⁸ This particular example is of a use of the legal system to promote moral objectives, an aspect which will be discussed in more detail later.

The threat of legal action with its potential to damage reputations only works, of course, if the individual concerned is worried about public perception. This is the case of the vast majority of bourgeois characters in the novels, but does not apply to

³ '[U]ne autre [...] faisait la femme honnête outragée, parlait d'intenter un procès au préfet de police' (*Nana* 1320).

⁴ 'Elle se récria de nouveau, elle ne lui laissait plus dire une parole, belle de violence, usant jusqu'aux larmes de la grande dame outragée. [...] [E]lle le menaçait de s'adresser aux tribunaux, pour venger une telle injure' (*Bonheur* 792).

⁵ She instructs Zoé: "'S'ils reviennent, menacez-les d'aller chez le commissaire'" (*Nana* 1165).

⁶ 'Elle le démontra le scandale inutile d'un duel et d'un procès' (*Nana* 1415). He is later persuaded by Labordette out of a duel over Nana on the grounds that he would become a laughingstock.

⁷ Busch threatens to leave at once and instigate proceedings which will appear in the newspapers. The prospect of this is too much for Mme de Beauvilliers. 'Dans les journaux! Cet horrible scandale sur les ruines mêmes de sa maison! Ce n'était donc pas assez de voir tomber en poudre l'antique fortune, il fallait que tout croulât dans la boue! Ah! que l'honneur du nom au moins fût sauvé!' (*Argent* 370).

⁸ "'Si vous revenez coucher, j'irai chercher un sergent de ville, moi!'" (*Pot-Bouille* 100).

the financier Aristide Saccard, who remains unmoved by the usurer Busch's threats to pursue him at law for the maintenance expenses of his recently discovered illegitimate son. Saccard is delighted to learn of his progeny, and tells Busch that 'la justice ne s'occupe pas de ces choses-là'.⁹ Similarly, it is Delcambre who prevents Saccard from shouting into the street during their fight over the baronne Sandorff.¹⁰

But most of the time it is the protection of property rights which drives the characters towards the legal system. We shall see shortly how this pattern reflects a class bias, and how the bourgeoisie and higher social classes are perceived as 'owning' the legal system and using it for their own purposes. Robert J. Neiss makes the interesting point that those social classes are more likely to be implicated in white-collar criminal activity related to property, than in crimes of violence or passion.¹¹

Muffat finds himself sued by his own daughter, Estelle, for recovery of an inheritance which seems to have disappeared into her father's funding of Nana's luxurious lifestyle (*Nana* 1464). In *Pot-Bouille* Auguste Vabre threatens legal action against his brother-in-law Duveyrier and the latter's lawyer, Renaudin, over the staged auction which saw Duveyrier acquire M. Vabre's apartment building at a knock-down price, which consequently reduced Auguste and his brother's inheritances (*Pot-Bouille* 222). Duveyrier, the magistrate, is once again on the receiving end of a threat of legal action, when one of his mistresses, Clarisse, threatens him with the police if he returns

⁹ *Argent* 292. Saccard continues: "Et, si vous espérez me faire chanter, c'est encore plus bête, parce que, moi, je me fiche de tout. Un enfant! mais je vous dis que ça me flatte!" (*ibid.*). The legal system does, of course, interest itself in precisely these domains. Recovery of debts is Busch's stock in trade, and, repellent as it may appear, it is sanctioned by the law.

¹⁰ Hastily dressing, Saccard tells the maid to open up the room. "Ouvrez les portes, ouvrez les fenêtres, pour que toute la maison et toute la rue entendent! ... M. le Procureur général veut qu'on sache qu'il est ici, et je vais le faire connaître, moi!" Pâlissant, Delcambre recula, en le voyant se diriger vers une des fenêtres, comme s'il voulait en tourner la crémone. Ce terrible homme était très capable d'exécuter sa menace, lui qui se moquait du scandale' (*Argent* 214).

¹¹ '[I]l reste vrai que les crimes de ce qu'on appelait autrefois les classes dirigeantes ne sont pas d'ordinaire des crimes passionnels; leurs spécialités sont d'ordre plus raffiné: la fraude, l'escroquerie, le détournement de fonds, la corruption. [...] Il y a, bien entendu, des bourgeois, dans ces romans, qui sont brutaux et agressifs, mais même ceux-ci ne sont jamais aussi violents que les vraies brutes de la série, les Buteau, les Chaval, les Bijard' ('Le thème de la violence dans *Les Rougon-Macquart*', *CN*, 42 (1971), 131-139, p.132). Discussing *Bête*, Nelly Wilson makes a similar point. 'To put it briefly, crimes, in bourgeois thinking, are committed for money; inheritance and theft in our context. [...] The various brutes, on the other hand, all of whom belong to the lower classes, commit crimes of passion' ('A question of motives: heredity and inheritance in *La Bête humaine*', in *Glasgow Colloque*, pp.184-195, p.185). This perhaps goes some distance to explain why Denizet and Cabuche are on such different wave-lengths.

to her flat, a property which he has furnished to her expensive taste and for which he pays the rent (355). In *Joie* Boutigny threatens Lazare, his former business partner, with a trial.¹² A furious Antoine Macquart learns that his half-brother, Pierre Rougon, has cheated him out of his share of the proceeds from the sale of their mother's property. He threatens legal action, which has the desired effect, as Félicité Rougon arranges to pay Macquart off and thus avoid the negative publicity.¹³

In *Terre*, the threats of legal action relate explicitly to property. Fouan threatens to call in the bailiffs against his two sons who are not paying their share of his pension (*Terre* 540, 543). The local tax collector, M. Hardy, tells Buteau that he will send the bailiff round if the taxes are not paid (649). La Grande threatens her brother Fouan with legal action should the 'comptes de tutelle' from his guardianship of Françoise not be in order (692). When the very recently widowed Jean Macquart is thrown out of his wife's house by the triumphant Buteau *ménage*, he threatens legal action, which is scoffed at by Buteau, as we saw in the passage quoted earlier.¹⁴ Like the majority of characters, Jean does not see the threat through to fruition, though he appears to have more confidence in the legal system than the peasants do.¹⁵

It is rare that the objective of recourse to the legal system is unconnected with property rights. There is an example in *Conquête*, however, where Félicité Rougon is ready to use the law to have her son-in-law, François Mouret, committed to an asylum. Her interest is to remove a perceived troublesome obstacle to her political objectives (swinging public opinion in the town towards Bonapartism), an interest which she disguises under a veil of concern for her daughter. As she tells Marthe:

¹² '[L]es dernières nouvelles de Caen, où Lazare venait de passer quarante-huit heures, pour un procès dont l'avait menacé cette canaille de Boutigny' (*Joie* 891).

¹³ In spite of Pierre's use of the 'vous' form, and his attempt to deny all knowledge of the matter, Macquart bellows his threat in more familiar language: "'Et mon argent," criait-il, "me le rendras-tu, voleur, ou faudra-t-il que je te traîne devant les tribunaux?"' (*Fortune* 114).

¹⁴ "'C'est bon, j'irai chez le juge, à Châteaudun, et il me fera rentrer chez moi, et je vous poursuivrai en justice pour des dommages-intérêts... Au revoir!"' (*Terre* 777).

¹⁵ When Françoise shows him the various injuries inflicted upon her by Buteau, he advises her to show other neighbours as well, as if to build up a case against Buteau, a claim which the legal system will support. He warns her not to take her own revenge against her attacker. "'Surtout, ne te revenge pas. La justice sera pour nous, quand nous aurons le droit"' (*Terre* 628). There appears to be a suggestion here of the legal system operating as an alternative to the Darwinian method of dispute resolution favoured by Buteau.

'Mais je ne te laisserai pas avec un tel monstre, ma fille. Il y a des lois, heureusement. [...] La justice n'est pas faite pour les chiens. [...] Les fous, on les enferme!'¹⁶

Physical protection is another non-property motive for which characters have recourse to the legal system in the novels. This is precisely the scenario envisaged by Silvine in the passage from *Débâcle* which we quoted above. It is seen most clearly in the environment of domestic violence in *Assommoir*.¹⁷ Mme Boche threatens to go to the police over Bijard's assaults on his wife (556) and Gervaise threatens to alert the police when she sees Bijard chase Lalie around the flat with a whip (693). On neither occasion do the police appear. They do, however, intervene in a dispute between Lantier and Adèle, where the crockery starts flying (549). Discussing the death of Mme Bijard with Goujet, Gervaise remarks:

'Mais la justice aurait trop de besogne, si elle s'occupait des femmes crevées par leurs maris. Un coup de pied de plus ou de moins, n'est-ce pas? ça ne compte pas, quand on en reçoit tous les jours. D'autant plus que la pauvre femme voulait sauver son homme de l'échafaud et expliquait qu'elle s'était abîmé le ventre en tombant sur un baquet ... Elle a hurlé toute la nuit avant de passer.' (*Assommoir* 614)

Mme Bijard's lying to protect her husband demonstrates the residual reticence, which is particularly marked in the lower social classes, to allow outside interference in the domestic or family situation. The phenomenon is also seen in *Terre* in Françoise's refusal to reveal the circumstances of the fatal injury she sustained at the hands of her scythe-wielding sister. The rarity of outside intervention to protect the victims of physical violence suggests an unspoken acceptance of Darwinian principles in the family context. Gervaise implies that the legal system - 'la justice' - has other

¹⁶ *Conquête* 1114-1115. Félicité takes direct action in the community, informing the local public officials that Mouret is deranged and a threat to her daughter. The republican peril which he represents, and which is the real cause of Félicité's concern, is not mentioned. "'Mais, sois tranquille, je veille sur toi, je prends mes précautions. Le jour où ton mari lèvera le petit doigt, il aura de mes nouvelles.'" Elle ne s'expliquait pas davantage. La vérité était qu'elle rendait visite à toutes les autorités de Plassans. Elle avait ainsi raconté les malheurs de sa fille au maire, au sous-préfet, au président du tribunal, d'une façon confidentielle, en leur faisant jurer une discrétion absolue' (1123). The use of the legal system to have an embarrassing family member sidelined is also seen in *Pot-Bouille* where Mme Jossérand has Saturnin carted off to an asylum by the police (*Pot-Bouille* 318). She also threatens to do the same to uncle Bachelard, who has proved uncooperative over financial support to the family. She claims that she will use the 'conseil de famille' to have the old man committed (347).

¹⁷ During the celebrated catspat in the laundry between Gervaise and Virginie, someone suggests calling the police and the owner refuses, on the grounds that it would compromise the establishment. Whether the compromising detail would be in the presence of the police or in the revelation of the fight, particularly one between women, is not clear (*Assommoir* 399).

priorities, namely the protection of property rights. This is demonstrated in the harsh punishment handed out to smugglers and poachers such as Macquart and Chantegreil in *Fortune*. The former is shot by a policeman, and the latter is deported.

What do these patterns of recourse to the legal system show us? On one level it is clear that some characters envisage the legal system as an alternative to a Darwinian method of dispute resolution. There is scant direct reference to finding justice in the legal system, the implications of which shall be explored later in this chapter. What does seem apparent is a class-based attitude towards recourse to the legal system. It is no coincidence that the legal system's focus on property rights is accompanied by a principally bourgeois recourse to it. Those who use it are the well-heeled, those who do not consider it an option for them are generally from the lower social classes.

We should also keep in mind that simply because it is presented as an alternative to the unjust ravages of Darwinism, it is not suggested that the legal system itself necessarily deals in justice. Etienne may well be right, and the legal system might operate as a form of disguised Darwinism. Nevertheless, the traditional association between the legal system and justice (which the terminology in French seems to underline) makes it an obvious port of call in our quest for justice.

Furthermore, the possibility suggested in the passages in *Débâcle* and *Germinal* that it might operate to redress the injustices of Darwinism cannot be ignored. In theory, we know that a legal system, with its emphasis on right rather than might, can counteract Darwinism. Will this be proved to be the case in practice in *Les Rougon-Macquart*? And what about the relationship with justice? Can the operation of the legal system be seen as dealing in justice - what are the priorities of the legal system, in which domains is it used, and by whom? What are the objectives of the representatives of the legal system - of whom there are a good handful in the cycle - are they interested in right rather than might? These are some issues to bear in mind as we examine the prominence of the legal system in the novels and the presentation of the representatives of the legal system.

What is the reality of 'légalité' under the Second Empire?¹⁸ What is the relationship between the legal system and justice in the cycle of novels? There is a long-standing cynical view that there is no relationship between justice and the legal system, but countering this jaundiced stance remains a vestigial urge for some characters, especially those associated with the legal system, who wish to see the connection between the two as more than illusory.

A legal system, through its definition of right and wrong, is a moral construct, which marks an important contrast with Darwinism. Of course the morality reflected in a legal system is going to be that of the political order which designs it - this ideological 'taint' is an inherent element of any legal system. In *Les Rougon-Macquart*, the supporters and representatives of the legal system are quick to underline its moral foundations. Zola's searing presentation of bourgeois hypocrisy demands, however, that we do not accept these assertions at face value. Equally, the claims of this class that the legal system deals in justice should be treated with caution. The justice in which the legal system deals will be that which answers the needs of the regime which instituted the legal system.

As we shall see later in this chapter, a regime will use the legal system to protect itself and its interests. Could it be that the legal system is nothing more than a disguised Darwinian order, masquerading as being connected to justice and morality, but in fact nothing more than a weapon in the hands of the already strong? Before we assume this pessimistic situation to be the case, let us assess whether there is any possibility that the legal system might be a source of justice. In theory, in any case, the legal system could operate as an equalising response to a Darwinian order, concerned as it should be with right rather than might.

The movement seen earlier in the chapter towards the legal system as a possible source of justice is further supported by the texts themselves, where the connection between justice and the legal system is made clear on the most basic level - that of

¹⁸ Although the word derives from the latin word for 'law' it makes an interesting homophone with 'l'égalité', and, as we shall see, the pronunciation appears to be the extent of what they have in common in the picture of the legal system painted by *Les Rougon-Macquart*.

terminology. The legal system is referred to as 'la justice' throughout *Les Rougon-Macquart*. Under the Constitution, it is in the name of the incarnation of the Empire, Napoléon III, that justice is dispensed.¹⁹

'Justice is administered in his name' (Art.7). This arrangement, apparently contrary to the independence of the judiciary, harks back to the *ancien régime*, in which the king regarded himself as the 'great dispenser of justice'.²⁰

This simple issue of labelling is not without importance. Firstly it hints at the connection between the legal system and the political order, which was mentioned above. Secondly, it suggests that the legal system holds itself out as intimately connected with justice, which would appear to justify characters' hopes in having recourse to it in their quest for justice. But are they setting themselves up for a disappointment?

The next part of this chapter will examine how the legal system is depicted in the cycle of novels. We will see the prominence of the legal system, and discuss the detailed examples of its presentation in the novels. We will then make a study of the representatives of the legal system - the characters by whose hands the legal system is designed, interpreted and enforced. The implications for justice will then be assessed. The final section of this chapter is concerned with the ideological function of the legal system, its use for what are essentially political ends, which would surely appear to detract from any unfettered operation of justice. It is in this section that the 'taint' referred to above becomes clear.

¹⁹ This is clear from the third part of the *Constitution du 14 janvier 1852*, which describes the role of the President of the Republic, Article 7: 'La justice se rend en son nom'. Under Article 7 of the *Sénatus-consulte du 7 novembre 1852* the previous Constitution is confirmed *mutatis mutandis*, so the Emperor assumes the functions and duties of the President (Jacques Godechot, *Les Constitutions de la France depuis 1789* (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1970), p.293, p.299).

²⁰ Alain Plessis, *The Rise and Fall of the Second Empire, 1852-1871* (Cambridge and London: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp.16-17.

The prominence of the legal system in *Les Rougon-Macquart*

Emile Zola's careful preparation and research are acknowledged features of his writing. His theoretical position on Naturalism dictates this apparent interest in accuracy of detail, and as concerns the legal system the author is as well prepared as in other domains. Just as he frequently charged the faithful Paul Alexis with locating precise information on a range of topics, Zola enlisted the assistance of lawyer Gabriel Thyébaud, the 'jurisconsulte' to *Les Rougon-Macquart*, to provide him with details on legal matters ranging from adoption and guardianship to the order of proceedings in a criminal trial. Some could suggest that this attention to legal detail is merely an effort to avoid any discordant background music and to ensure a degree of verisimilitude.²¹ Is it fair to see the presence of the legal system in the novels as nothing more than attention to detail and part of Zola's avowed plan to depict all aspects of life in Second Empire France?

The aim of this section is to illustrate the range of references to the legal system in the cycle of novels, and to refute the suggestion that there is no more to Zola's presentation of the legal system in *Les Rougon-Macquart* than simply a collection of occasional references to one facet of the social order.²² The sheer number of references to the law and the coherent picture which is built up of the representatives of the legal system support a preliminary conclusion that showing the workings of the legal system under the Second Empire was among Zola's objectives.²³

²¹ Discussing the use to which Zola put the 'Notes Malet', notes which he made during a fact-finding visit to the office of the local lawyer in Médan, Guy Robert says: 'Il lui suffit de voir garantie la vraisemblance juridique de certains éléments de l'intrigue' (Robert, *Terre*, p.223).

²² For example, Françoise Naudin-Patriat identifies the author's interest in showing how the legal system fits in to the broader social picture. 'Emile Zola s'intéresse peu dans *Les Rougon-Macquart* aux techniques juridiques en elles-mêmes; en revanche, il montre bien comment certaines institutions juridiques fonctionnent, quelle fonction elles remplissent, comment elles sont intégrées à l'ordre social' (*Ténèbres et lumière de l'argent : la représentation de l'ordre social dans "Les Rougon-Macquart"* (Dijon: Université de Dijon, 1981), p.xviii).

²³ Aimé Dupuy points out that Zola's depiction of the judiciary was incomplete. 'D'autre part, Zola nous a bien dépeint le personnel judiciaire du Second Empire : mais réduit, en fait, à la magistrature debout, et sans les vigoureuses silhouettes d'un Barreau' ('Le Second Empire vu et jugé par Emile Zola', *L'Information historique*, 2 (1953), 50-57, p.53).

Les Rougon-Macquart can be divided into texts where the legal system has a prominent function and texts where allusions to it are few and far between. Anecdotal references to legal formalities (the background detail referred to above) are found in all the novels apart from *Faute*. A handful of the novels have subplots involving some aspect of the legal system, ranging from the mock trial of Goliath Steinberg in *Débâcle* to Aristide Saccard's detailed scheming to navigate his way around the legal regulation of the property and money markets in *Curée* and *Argent*. *Terre* is an interesting example - Zola's novel on the peasantry is full of struggles over property, and it is one of the most legally-rich novels in the cycle, given the Fouan family's obsession with the transmission of property and la Grande's testamentary whimsy.²⁴ In addition, there are two novels in the cycle where there is a detailed focus on the operation of the legal system proper. Those novels are *Excellence*, the 'political' novel of the cycle, and *Bête* which Zola termed his 'judicial' novel.²⁵

It should be said first that, generally speaking, the legal system is not a prominent feature of *Les Rougon-Macquart*, and that detailed representations of things legal are extremely rare. This, however, is more or less as things are in life, and one aspect of Zola's presentation of the legal system is to show its impact to at least some degree on the lives of characters of all sorts, from the provincial peasantry to the Parisian politicians.²⁶ Far and away the most common reference to the legal system in the cycle of novels takes the form of background detail alluding to administrative formalities required by law. This widespread impact of the legal system on the

²⁴ 'Agée de quatre-vingt-huit ans, elle ne se préoccupait de sa mort que pour laisser à ses héritiers, avec sa fortune, le tracés de procès sans fin : une complication de testament extraordinaire, embrouillée par plaisir, où sous le prétexte de ne faire du tort à personne, elle les forçait de se dévorer tous; une idée à elle, puisqu'elle ne pouvait emporter ses biens, de s'en aller au moins avec la consolation qu'ils empoisonneraient les autres. Et elle n'avait de la sorte pas de plus gros amusement que de voir la famille se manger' (*Terre* 688). Scarcely a family occasion goes by when la Grande does not refer to her will and her plans to leave her relations provided for.

²⁵ In the outline of the cycle of novels he planned to write, submitted to the publisher Lacroix in 1869, Zola identifies '[u]n roman qui aura pour cadre le monde judiciaire' (*RM* V 1776). In addition, a list of novels drawn up in 1872 features both '[l]e roman politique (journaux) - Eugène Rougon' and '[l]e roman judiciaire [chemin de fer] - Etienne Lantier' (1778). In an article which traces the comments in the dossier of *Bête* and the references therein to the judicial angle in the novel, Philippe Hamon suggests that Zola's real judicial novel falls beyond *Les Rougon-Macquart* : 'Le "roman sur la magistrature" est un très ancien projet de Zola, qui n'écrit cependant véritablement ce roman qu'en 1902 avec *Vérité*, réécriture romancée de l'affaire Dreyfus' ('Le juge Denizet dans *La Bête humaine*' in *Miscellanées Mitterand*, pp.137-144, p.138).

²⁶ We saw in the first chapter the exceptional case of the primitive communities who appear to exist in a legal system-free zone.

characters, albeit at the periphery of their existences, can be seen in the many examples of characters complying with the legal obligation to declare births, deaths and marriages to the relevant authorities.

In *Assommoir* Coupeau uses his lunch hour to register Nana's birth.²⁷ This novel is surprisingly rich in legal formalities and in the presence of the police. Mes-Bottes is asked to show his papers,²⁸ and there is the police intervention in the fight between Lantier and Adèle which we saw above. The police check out the rowdy party held on Gervaise's saint's day.²⁹ They also shut down disreputable establishments.³⁰ These examples serve to show the background presence of the police in the lives of the urban working class. They also suggest the operation of the legal system as an ideological force, working towards a moral objective, such as keeping the streets clean of dodgy riff-raff, which is seen even more clearly in the police raids in *Nana* where prostitutes are rounded up.

Gervaise and Coupeau's marriage and its legal formalities are described in some detail in *Assommoir*. The couple work out in advance who they want for their witnesses (*Assommoir* 434), and on the day of the ceremony they arrive early at the *mairie* and the mayor is running late, leaving the wedding party in an antechamber.³¹ The civil ceremony (like the religious one) is rushed through, leaving them feeling cheated out of half of the performance for which they paid good money.³² In *Œuvre* there is also reference to the formalities of marriage. Claude and Christine consider that a simple service at the *mairie* will suffice to formalise their relationship, and Claude faces a

²⁷ 'Il profita même de l'heure de son déjeuner, alla à la mairie faire sa déclaration' (*Assommoir* 472).

²⁸ "'J'ai usé mes plantes pendant trois heures sur la route, même qu'un gendarme m'a demandé mes papiers...'" (*Assommoir* 452).

²⁹ 'La clameur de cette rigolade énorme couvrait le roulement des dernières voitures. Deux sergents de ville, croyant à une émeute, accoururent; mais, en apercevant Poisson, ils eurent un petit salut d'intelligence. Ils s'éloignèrent lentement, côte à côte, le long des maisons noires' (*Assommoir* 594).

³⁰ Gervaise looks at her former flat in the Hôtel Boncœur. 'La petite maison, après avoir été un café suspect, que la police avait fermé, se trouvait abandonnée' (*Assommoir* 766).

³¹ They exhibit the same timorous respect before the legal system and its representatives as the peasants in M. Baillehache's office (*Terre*). 'Ils attendirent sur des chaises, dans un coin de la salle, regardant le haut plafond et la sévérité des murs, parlant bas, reculant leurs sièges par excès de politesse, chaque fois qu'un garçon de bureau passait. [...] Mais, quand le magistrat parut, ils se levèrent respectueusement. On les fit rasseoir' (*Assommoir* 435).

³² 'Et les formalités, la lecture du Code, les questions posées, la signature des pièces, furent expédiées si rondement, qu'ils se regardèrent, se croyant volés d'une bonne moitié de la cérémonie' (*Assommoir* 436).

lengthy procedure to assemble the required paperwork.³³ As in the Coupeaus' case, the civil ceremony is a rushed affair, though in the later novel, it is the wedding party which arrives late.³⁴ In *Terre* it is la Grande who undertakes the completion of marriage formalities on Françoise's behalf (for a financial consideration!).³⁵ Macqueron, the new mayor, enjoys exhibiting his official power by overplaying the formalities in front of his predecessor, Hourdequin, who attends the wedding as the groom's witness.³⁶

Whether deaths are natural, such as that of Mère Coupeau (*Assommoir*), or suspicious as in the case of Antoine Macquart's spontaneous combustion (*Pascal*) and the suspected poisoning of Phasie (*Bête*), or even by the deceased's own hand, as is Claude's situation in *Œuvre*, the deaths are reported to the authorities. In an ironic touch in *Joie*, the doctor attends to the formalities of declaring the death of Mme Chanteau, one of which is a formal announcement made to the local mayor who, in this case, is the recently widowed spouse of the deceased.³⁷

In *Assommoir* it is Lantier who goes to the *mairie* to report the death of Gervaise's mother-in-law.³⁸ The requirement of attending to administrative formalities gives Misard a further couple of hours to search for Phasie's nest-egg. He sends Flore off to declare the death, thereby buying himself another opportunity to carry on his obsessive quest for his wife's imagined fortune.³⁹ The peasants of Rognes stand

³³ 'D'ailleurs, Claude ne hâta aucune des formalités, et l'attente des papiers nécessaires fut longue. [...] Ils avaient résolu de se marier seulement à la mairie, non par un mépris affiché de la religion, mais pour faire vite et simple' (*Œuvre* 220).

³⁴ 'On monta tous ensemble, on fut très mal reçu par l'huissier de service, à cause du retard. D'ailleurs, le mariage se trouva bâclé en quelques minutes, dans une salle absolument vide [...] On ne dit pas un mot de la simple formalité qu'on venait de remplir' (*Œuvre* 226).

³⁵ Seeing in Françoise's marriage to Jean potential for enmity between the couple and the *ménage* Buteau, la Grande's enthusiasm for the marriage is considerable. 'Alors, elle bouscula les choses, retrouva des jambes de jeune garce, s'occupa des papiers de sa nièce, se fit remettre ceux de Jean, régla tout à la mairie et à l'église, poussa la passion jusqu'à prêter l'argent nécessaire, contre un papier signé des deux, et où la somme fut doublée, pour les intérêts' (*Terre* 692).

³⁶ 'A la mairie, Macqueron, devant l'ancien maire, exagéra les formalités, tout gonflé de son importance' (*Terre* 693).

³⁷ 'Le docteur s'était obligeamment chargé de toutes les formalités; et il n'y en eut qu'une de pénible, à Bonneville, la déclaration que Chanteau était chargé de recevoir en qualité de maire' (*Joie* 981).

³⁸ Or at least he leaves Gervaise and the inconsolable Coupeau with the corpse and escapes the flat: 'Lantier fila bientôt, sous le prétexte d'aller prévenir la famille et de passer à la mairie faire la déclaration' (*Assommoir* 656).

³⁹ 'Tout de suite, Misard, pour se débarrasser de Flore, l'envoya déclarer le décès à Doinville' (*Bête* 1244).

around Palmyre's body in the field, where she has expired from exhaustion, concerned not to move her until the mayor has been notified. The text is not specific why the mayor needs to be told, but this example shows once more that regardless of the class of character, there is an awareness that legal requirements do impact on them.⁴⁰

The most detailed account of this formality is to be found in *Pascal*, where it is the eponymous hero who undertakes the declaration of his uncle's death to the *commune's* mayor, who happens to be the local notary with whom the deceased lodged his will. M. Maurin accompanies Pascal to the site of Antoine Macquart's death to witness the scene of the accident, a step necessary before the issuing of the death certificate.⁴¹ When it comes to Pascal's own death, his colleague the young Dr Ramond, saves Clotilde the additional strain of attending to the formalities.⁴² It appears that suicide presents more problems, as in *Œuvre* Sandoz spends a good deal of time attending to the arrangements for Claude's funeral.⁴³

A further domain in which legal formalities appear in *Les Rougon-Macquart* is in the business relationships between characters, especially in partnership arrangements. In *Conquête* Faujas' sister, Olympe, plays on Marthe's devotion to the priest to extort money with a story of partnership debts arising from business dealings in Besançon which, if left unpaid, could give rise to legal proceedings in which the ambitious cleric might be implicated.⁴⁴ When pressed to explain his unemployment, Lantier recounts, *inter alia*, that he retired after a partner in a hat-making business spent all the firm's money on women.⁴⁵ The legal implications of partnership arrangements are seen in *Joie* where Lazare is threatened with legal action by his former partner, Boutigny, as we saw earlier.

⁴⁰ 'Est-ce qu'on pouvait la toucher, sans aller chercher le maire?' (*Terre* 576).

⁴¹ 'M. Maurin s'effara, voulut remonter avec le docteur constater l'accident, promit de dresser un acte de décès en règle' (*Pascal* 1098).

⁴² "'Puis, il y a toutes sortes de formalités, la déclaration, le convoi, dont je veux vous éviter le souci'" (*Pascal* 1189).

⁴³ Sandoz arranges everything to save Christine the effort. The funeral is held after 'les formalités et les retards occasionnés par le suicide' (*Œuvre* 353).

⁴⁴ Olympe claims that she and her husband Honoré Trouche were cheated: 'Ils étaient trop bons, on avait toujours abusé d'eux; et elle entra dans des explications sur leurs affaires de Besançon, où la coquinerie d'un associé leur avait mis de lourdes dettes sur le dos' (*Conquête* 1069).

⁴⁵ 'Pendant les huit dernières années, il avait un moment dirigé une fabrique de chapeaux; et quand on lui demandait pourquoi il s'était retiré, il se contentait de parler de la coquinerie d'un associé, un compatriote, une canaille qui avait mangé la maison avec les femmes' (*Assommoir* 598).

The legal system should operate as a brake on sharp practice in the business world. In *Curée* and *Argent*, the statutory safeguards put in place to protect investors and to keep speculators on the straight and narrow are no barrier to Aristide Saccard. In both those novels, Saccard is aware of the legal requirements (though seems to have no belief in the rights they are designed to protect) and uses his crafty business-sense to circumvent them. In the earlier novel he uses a series of intermediaries ('prête-noms') to conceal his investments in properties which are being valued for compulsory acquisition during the Haussmannisation of Paris.⁴⁶ In *Argent* he uses a series of 'jeux d'écritures' to navigate his way round the requirements of the companies and securities legislation in his management of the Banque Universelle. Our interest is not in the intricacies of these wheezes employed by Saccard, but more in what the implications are for enforcement of legislation. Rights may exist on paper, but they are difficult to assert and protect in real life, especially when minds such as Saccard's conspire to thwart the purpose of the laws. The legal system's promise of justice is not backed up by delivery.

The general impression from these examples of legal formalities in the novels seems to be that the characters accept the legal system's role as the administrative regulator of their lives (from birth, through marriage, to death). The workings of the legal system function as a source of entertainment, as attested by the keen interest in the court news columns and criminal *faits divers* in the newspapers, which is seen particularly in *Assommoir* and which is fuelled by the Grandmorin case in *Bête*.⁴⁷ Characters take a lurid delight in both the horrifying details of the cases, and also in the punitive potential of the legal system. Awareness of the legal system is also seen in the respect which characters, particularly the less sophisticated, exhibit towards its

⁴⁶ There are some particularly blatant examples of impropriety where business associates find themselves on the expropriation committee setting inflated levels of compensation for their colleagues.

⁴⁷ The characters discuss high profile characters and read aloud extracts from newspaper reports of celebrated trials. For example, shortly after Nana's birth, everyone is very excited about a recent murder in the area: '[A]u milieu des grosses voix, des réflexions interminables sur un assassinat, commis la veille rue du Bon-Puits, à l'autre bout de la Chapelle' (*Assommoir* 470). The suicide by hanging, many years previously, of Goujet's father, whilst in custody for a drunken murder becomes a rumour in the hands of Mme Lorilleux: "Le père ne s'est-il pas coupé la tête avec un couteau, pour éviter la peine à la guillotine? Enfin, quelque sale histoire dans ce genre!" (498). Lantier reads aloud from the paper about politics and is told by Coupeau: "Lisez les assassinats, c'est plus rigolo" (626). The characters then discuss the various murders and debate the sentences passed.

representatives (the irony of such individuals as recipients of respect will be revealed in the next section) and the fear they have of it, which sometimes operates as a deterrent. In spite of this awareness, considerably less widespread is an appreciation of the potential of the legal system for justice.

Looking beyond the legal formalities we have seen above, there are situations where the operation of the legal system is depicted in more detail. For example, it plays a considerable part in the protracted struggle between Octave Mouret and Bourras in *Bonheur*. The novel charts the ascendancy of the businessman which began in Marseilles (*Conquête*) and developed further in Paris (*Pot-Bouille*). The huge department store is seen to take over an entire neighbourhood, putting a large number of small, specialised boutiques, including that of Denise Baudu's uncle, out of business.

One of the most determined opponents of Mouret's domination is Bourras, who makes and sells hand-turned canes and umbrellas. In Bourras' resistance can be seen a Darwinian struggle between the strong and the weak. The weaker party, Bourras, has recourse to and is protected to an extent by the legal system. Mouret's initial approach is to buy the building and use the property for extensions to the department store.⁴⁸ His generous offers are rejected as Bourras is determined not to surrender his leasehold, even when Mouret offers eight times its value.⁴⁹

All around Bourras' dilapidated premises are the properties which Mouret has been acquiring to extend his empire, and from the building sites emanate endless noise and disruption. Having finally secured ownership of the building, Mouret can impose renovations and repairs on the sitting tenant, but a proposed tunnel connecting two

⁴⁸ Bourras is not the owner of the property. The owner believes that he can screw more money out of Mouret, seeing how important a site his building represents - it is the only land on the block which Mouret has not acquired. Bourras is grudgingly impressed by the owner's refusal to sell for twice the value: "un gredin comme eux, a voulu les faire chanter" (*Bonheur* 569). When Mouret finally acquires the building, he must still dislodge the sitting tenant. Bourras has a thirty year lease, and his rights are protected by law.

⁴⁹ Bourras objects on principle to Mouret's business practices and does not wish to facilitate the growth of the department store which has sounded the death knell for other shops in the area. '[A]u fond de son obstination, grondait la révolte du petit fabricant personnel, contre l'envahissement banal des articles de bazar' (*Bonheur* 569). 'Et il défendait sa boutique comme une fille honnête défend sa vertu, au nom de l'honneur, par respect de lui-même' (581).

wings of the department store scarcely qualifies under this head.⁵⁰ The merchant consults a lawyer and embarks on a lengthy legal challenge to Mouret's project.⁵¹ After two years, Bourras wins the case, but is bankrupted by the cost of the legal proceedings, as he announces during Geneviève's funeral procession:

'Moi, j'ai mon compte ... Mais je le tiens tout de même et je ne le lâche pas. Il a encore perdu en appel. Ah! ça m'a coûté bon : près de deux ans de procès, et les avoués, et les avocats! N'importe, il ne passera pas sous ma boutique, les juges ont décidé qu'un tel travail n'avait point le caractère d'une réparation motivée. [...] Possible que je reste sur le carreau. Depuis que j'ai à me battre contre les huissiers, je sais que le gredin recherche mes créances, histoire sans doute de me jouer un vilain tour.' (*Bonheur* 744)

This pyrrhic victory is aggravated by the discovery by Mouret's legal team of a technicality, by which Bourras is expelled - without compensation - from his shop.⁵² His ultimate resistance results in the humiliation of a police presence as he is forced from the premises.⁵³

The result of this Darwinian encounter is a perfect illustration of the ambiguous position of the legal system. On one hand, it can be a protector of the weak (Bourras wins his case - Mouret's proposed tunnel is judged illegal) but on the other, it can be used as a tool in the hands of the strong against the weak.⁵⁴ The legal protection to

⁵⁰ Mouret's architect plans to link the main site of the department store with the building on the other side of Bourras' premises. '[Il] avait imaginé de creuser un passage, sous la petite maison qui les séparait' (*Bonheur* 605).

⁵¹ 'Des travaux de réparation, soit! mais c'étaient là des travaux d'embellissement. Le quartier pensait qu'il gagnerait, sans pourtant jurer de rien. En tout cas, le procès menaçait d'être long, on se passionnait pour ce duel interminable. Le jour où Denise résolut enfin de lui donner congé, Bourras revenait précisément de chez son avocat. "Croyez-vous!" cria-t-il, "ils disent maintenant que la maison n'est pas solide, ils prétendent établir qu'il faut en reprendre les fondations ... Parbleu! ils sont las de la secouer, avec leurs sacrées machines. Ce n'est pas étonnant, si elle se casse!"' (*Bonheur* 605).

⁵² 'Bourras était debout, planté sur le trottoir en face de sa maison, dont on l'avait expulsé la veille, à la suite d'un joli tour, une trouvaille de l'avoué : comme Mouret possédait des créances, il venait d'obtenir aisément la mise en faillite du marchand de parapluies, puis il avait acheté cinq cents francs le droit au bail, dans la vente faite par le syndic; de sorte que le vieillard entêté s'était laissé prendre pour cinq cents francs ce qu'il n'avait pas voulu lâcher pour cent mille' (*Bonheur* 756).

⁵³ 'D'ailleurs, l'architecte, qui arrivait avec sa bande de démolisseurs, avait dû requérir le commissaire pour le mettre dehors. Les marchandises étaient vendues, les chambres démenagées; lui, s'obstinait dans le coin où il couchait, et dont on n'osait le chasser, par une pitié dernière. Même les démolisseurs attaquèrent la toiture sur sa tête. On avait retiré les ardoises pourries, les plafonds s'effondraient, les murs craquaient, et il restait là, sous les vieilles charpentes à nu, au milieu des décombres. Enfin, devant la police, il était parti' (*Bonheur* 756-757).

⁵⁴ Bourras uses Darwinian terminology, of the sort seen in the first chapter, to describe the relationship between himself and Mouret's store. Bourras is confident that he can win and that he will 'mangerait le monstre' (*Bonheur* 568).

which Bourras is entitled as a sitting tenant is overridden by Mouret's cunning scheme. The legal system protects Bourras the tenant, but not Bourras the debtor. The cost of recourse to the legal system has proved literally ruinous for Bourras, and the implications of this for the legal system are important. Bourras joins a catalogue of characters in *Les Rougon-Macquart* who are ruined, both socially and financially, by legal proceedings, whether or not they were in the right.⁵⁵

When it comes down to it, the legal system favours the wealthy - as less well-placed litigants are wiped out in the course of a legal war of attrition. Whilst their rights may be protected by the law, these characters are unable to assert their rights in the face of the costs extracted by the legal system. The weak may have rights which exist on paper, but they do not have the financial strength to assert them against the strong characters. In this way, the legal system supports the prevailing Darwinism - its focus on property rights, as we saw earlier, already allies it with the dominant social classes, and there is a disguised Darwinism in the impossibility for the weak characters to protect their rights by recourse to the legal system.

This ambivalence of the legal system in operation is seen clearly in two episodes in the cycle of novels. In a context unrelated to legal formalities and the world of property rights, these examples represent interesting parallels. They are two relatively detailed accounts of the nature of the legal relationship engendered by an adoption or by a guardianship arrangement.⁵⁶ Given the importance of family in *Les Rougon-Macquart* perhaps it should come as no surprise that these variations on it should be accorded a mention in the novels.

Rêve, one of more ethereal novels in the cycle, contains precise information about the Huberts' adoption of Angélique Rougon, hitherto a ward of the state.⁵⁷ We learn that

⁵⁵ Pauline, one of Denise's colleagues in the department store was forced into employment after her father was ruined by a trial: '[L]e père Cugnot ruiné par un procès, et qui l'avait envoyée à Paris faire fortune' (*Bonheur* 510). In *Œuvre*, there is reference to a succession of trials which Sandoz's mother had to endure after the death of her husband, a detail taken from Zola's own life: 'toute une série de procès si obscurs, que la fortune entière avait coulé dans le désastre' (*Œuvre* 35).

⁵⁶ There is a much less detailed account of a guardianship arrangement in *Terre* where Fouan becomes his niece Françoise's 'tuteur', upon the death of his brother.

⁵⁷ Zola had asked Thyébaud for specific details about wards of the state, and he responded with information and a copy of the official documentation which accompanied such a child throughout their

the 'enfant assisté' must be proved to be such and that this is done by reference to Angélique's 'petit livret' which states her 'numéro matricule' and records her passage through various state-run orphanages and institutions. Without this document she does not exist, as in her case there is no official record of her parentage, nor even a birth certificate.⁵⁸

Angélique's status as a former 'enfant assisté' is referred to at various points in the novel, as is her 'petit livret'. The Huberts discover that an adoption is impossible until the child reaches majority. The lawyer they consult recommends that they bypass this obstacle by entering into a 'tutelle officieuse' - a wardship arrangement - by which any individual over the age of fifty can have a legal document prepared by which they assume responsibility for a minor.⁵⁹

On several occasions, whilst struggling against the force of her passion for the high-born Félicien, in a quest for humility and calm, Angélique leafs through her 'petit livret' and recalls her childhood, the official medical visits, her resistance to wearing the necklace featuring her matriculation number which she considered enslaved her. The formal, legal document assumes a symbolic significance, and she eventually shows it to her fiancé, revealing the miserable circumstances of her low birth and infancy, and hands the official record over to him.⁶⁰ Official consent is required before the former 'enfant assisté' may marry, in spite of the Huberts' wardship.⁶¹

life. In his notes to the Folio edition of the novel, Henri Mitterand refers to the lawyer's involvement: 'C'est Gabriel Thyébaut, informateur juridique de Zola pour plusieurs de ses romans antérieurs, qui envoya à Zola un livret d'élève des Enfants-Assistés' (Paris: Gallimard, 1986, p.260). In addition, Mitterand points out that Zola had recourse to the Larousse *Grand Dictionnaire universel du XIXe siècle* for further information. In the Pléiade edition these points are also addressed, and Thyébaut's information set out in full (*RM* IV 1664-1666).

⁵⁸ 'Ainsi, père et mère inconnus, aucun papier, pas même un extrait de naissance, rien que ce livret d'une froideur administrative, avec sa couverture de toile rose pâle. Personne au monde et un écrou, l'abandon numéroté et classé' (*Rêve* 821).

⁵⁹ 'Les âges y étaient, ils acceptèrent, enchantés; et même il fut convenu qu'ils confèreraient ensuite l'adoption à leur pupille, par voie testamentaire, ainsi que le code le permet' (*Rêve* 841).

⁶⁰ 'C'était le journal de sa misère' (*Rêve* 956). She hands it over to Félicien: 'C'étaient ses parchemins, à elle, cette pièce administrative, cet écrou où il n'y avait qu'une date suivie d'un numéro' (986).

⁶¹ Official approval was also necessary when the 'tutelle officieuse' was arranged. The Huberts' legal adviser, M. Grandsire 'se chargea de la demande du mari et de l'autorisation de la femme, puis se mit en rapport avec le Directeur de l'Assistance publique, tuteur de tous les enfants assistés, dont il fallait obtenir le consentement. Il y eut enquête, enfin les pièces furent déposées à Paris, chez le juge de paix désigné' (*Rêve* 841-842). For the marriage, once again the 'juge de paix' attends to the details: 'Hubert, malgré sa tutelle officieuse, avait dû demander son consentement au Directeur de l'Assistance publique,

In *Joie* there is another guardianship arrangement. The central character, Pauline Quenu, is made a ward of her relatives by her father's will.⁶² As heir to her parents' prosperous butchery business in Les Halles, her country cousins are well aware that Pauline will be far from a drain on their household. The text is clear on the legal nature of the relationship which guardianship represents. A 'conseil de famille' has to be nominated, composed of three members from both Pauline's maternal and paternal families. Mme Chanteau has chosen people unlikely to interfere in her management of Pauline's education and fortune.⁶³

In addition, the family council selects Aristide Saccard as the surrogate guardian. He informs them that due to his considerable commitments elsewhere he will not be too active a presence in Pauline's upbringing, which pleases Mme Chanteau. The *charcuterie* is sold at auction and the proceeds, along with some securities found in a desk in the family's apartment, are brought with Pauline to Bonneville. The family council also authorises payment from Pauline's assets for Mme Chanteau's travelling expenses and eight hundred francs annually for Pauline's board.

From time to time in the novel the issue of duties of guardianship arise, especially those of the Chanteau family towards Pauline's fortune. After eight years without a peep out of him, Saccard threatens to arrive at Bonneville and call them to account for their management of the ward's property.⁶⁴ Not satisfied by the response to his

qui représentait toujours le conseil de famille, Angélique n'étant point majeure; et M. Grandsire, le juge de paix, s'était chargé de ces détails, afin d'en éviter le côté pénible à Félicien et à la jeune fille' (986).

⁶² 'Quand ce notaire de Paris lui avait écrit que son cousin Quenu, veuf depuis six mois, venait de mourir à son tour en le chargeant par testament de la tutelle de sa fille, il ne s'était pas senti la force de refuser' (*Joie* 808).

⁶³ Amongst the family members are several familiar names from other novels in the cycle. Mme Chanteau explains her choice to her husband: "'Chez le juge de paix, j'ai fait désigner, pour le conseil de famille, trois parents du côté de Lisa, deux jeunes cousins, Octave Mouret et Claude Lantier, et un cousin par alliance, M. Rambaud, lequel habite Marseille; puis, de notre côté, du côté de Quenu, j'ai pris les neveux Naudet, Liardin et Delorme. C'est, tu le vois, un conseil de famille très convenable, et dont nous ferons ce que nous voudrons pour le bonheur de l'enfant...'" (*Joie* 825).

⁶⁴ 'Et le pis était que le subrogé tuteur, ce Saccard, qui emplissait alors Paris du tapage de ses spéculations, venait de se rappeler Pauline, après avoir paru l'oublier pendant près de huit ans. Il écrivait, demandait des nouvelles, parlait même de tomber un matin à Bonneville, en allant traiter une affaire à Cherbourg. Que répondre, s'il exigeait un état de situation, ainsi qu'il en avait le droit? Son brusque réveil, à la suite d'une si longue indifférence, devenait menaçant' (*Joie* 881).

demand, Saccard threatens to inform the family council that the Chanteau family has not fulfilled their fiduciary duties.⁶⁵

Having dipped into Pauline's funds whenever she has needed money, far beyond the costs of Pauline's upkeep, exceeding household expenses, even including investments in Lazare's failed business ventures, a mixture of guilt and fear pushes Mme Chanteau to acquaint herself with the intricacies of the Code. She learns that marriage (to their son Lazare, with the remains of the fortune passing to the family as Pauline's dowry) would have the same effect as Pauline's attaining majority - namely the end of the requirement to account for their management of her assets. A cover-up of some sort is necessary, as suggested by Françoise Naudin-Patriat's assessment of Mme Chanteau's management of Pauline's property: 'sa gestion ressemble fort à une dilapidation' (Naudin-Patriat, p.94). As Saccard's threats become more pressing, a marriage between the cousins seems to be the only way out.⁶⁶

Things are, however, not quite as simple as Mme Chanteau hopes. Closer inspection of the Code reveals that upon the ward's marriage an account will nevertheless have to be given, by a trustee appointed by the family council, of the guardians' management of the ward's property. She decides that the family doctor will be the 'curateur complaisant' she requires.⁶⁷ Dr Cazenove, meanwhile, considers that the family has been exploiting Pauline and her money for a good many years, and tries to make this clear to her. Pauline, however, indicates that she will not attempt to prevent the Chanteau family taking what remains of her property for their own.

⁶⁵ 'C'était encore une lettre de Saccard, menaçante cette fois. Depuis novembre, il écrivait pour demander un état de situation; et, comme les Chanteau répondaient par des faux-fuyants, il annonçait enfin qu'il allait saisir de leur refus le conseil de famille' (*Joie* 888).

⁶⁶ 'En effet, Mme Chanteau lisait le Code, maintenant. Ses derniers scrupules s'y débattaient, elle y cherchait des excuses; puis, tout le travail sourd d'une captation légale l'intéressait, dans l'émiettement continu de son honnêteté, que la tentation de cette grosse somme, dormant près d'elle, avait détruite un peu à chaque heure' (*Joie* 882). Mme Chanteau has her own copy of the Code, as does Saccard himself. He consults it in some detail before entering into a marriage contract with Renée Béraud Du Châtel. 'Depuis huit jours, il feuilletait le Code, il méditait sur cette grave question, dont dépendait dans l'avenir sa liberté de tripoteur d'affaires' (*Curée* 382).

⁶⁷ 'Certes, elle tenait dans sa main tous les membres du conseil, elle leur ferait nommer qui elle voudrait; seulement, quel homme choisir, où le prendre? Le problème était de substituer à un subrogé tuteur redouté un curateur complaisant' (*Joie* 889).

M. and Mme Chanteau, having followed the legal requirement of presenting accounts ten days earlier to Pauline (they evidently find it much easier to follow the administrative demands of the law than to act in accordance with legislative intention), assemble the interested parties to sign the documents formally ending the guardianship.⁶⁸ Mme Chanteau hands over what remains of Pauline's fortune (about fifty percent of the original sum) and their legal relationship comes to an end.

In this instance, the law is sound (albeit reflecting a property bias) - the legal protections for Pauline and her assets are clearly presented, but, as is seen in the case of Saccard in 'his' novels, the law is only as good as its enforcement, which, in this instance, is nil. Cazenove, as the trustee, is too weak (chosen precisely because of his long-standing relationship with the family, which served to compromise his independence) to perform his duties : '[s]a mission de curateur restait illusoire' (*Joie* 905). Aristide Saccard does not follow through on his threats to check on the Chanteaus' management of Pauline's fortune, and, perhaps most importantly, Pauline does not have the desire to protect her own interests at what she considers to be the expense of the family who took her in. Véronique, the maid, reminds Pauline that she had legal grounds upon which to challenge the Chanteaus.⁶⁹

Rights are of no use unless they are exercised, and there are two requirements for exercising rights - first the will to do so, which Pauline is lacking here, and secondly the financial wherewithal to do so, which Bourras lacked in his legal challenge to Mouret. In Pauline's case, the law could operate to protect the rights of the weak against the strong (and thus turn the Darwinian tide) but the protection appears to be refused by the very individual who needs it, and once again the legal system's absence of enforcement undercuts the statutory intention.

The role of the legal system appears ambiguous in the context of these guardianship relationships. Let us examine the contrasting elements of the two cases. In the first,

⁶⁸ This procedure is described in some detail in the novel (*Joie* 893ff.). Pauline terminates the legal relationship with relief. 'Heureusement, il ne restait qu'à donner les signatures. Pauline, d'un trait de plume, se hâta de tout approuver. Puis, le docteur, comme à regret, balafré le papier timbré d'un parafe immense. Un silence pénible s'était fait' (894).

⁶⁹ Véronique tells Pauline: "[V]ous pouviez l'envoyer droit en cour d'assises" (*Joie* 955).

the law is used by the Huberts to secure a satisfactory arrangement for all concerned. Their actions are dictated by charity and by a sense of duty in the absence of any family bonds. They are unaware of the law and become informed as to its requirements and obey them, their actions fulfilling the legislative intention. In the case of Pauline Quenu and the Chanteau family, the exploitation of Pauline and her fortune is aggravated by the family connection between the parties, and rather than respecting the intention of the relevant articles of the Code, Mme Chanteau wilfully attempts to circumvent the limits and protections enshrined in the legislation.

In the first case, where the legal formalities are observed, the result is just. In the second, where the legal requirements are not respected, an injustice is done. It is, however, too easy to extrapolate from these two examples that there is an intimate connection between the legal system and justice. A lot seems to hinge on the decency and goodwill of the individuals concerned - those who strive to navigate a path around the law appear to succeed.⁷⁰

Could this mean that the legal system is a neutral factor in the novels? It certainly demonstrates that, in theory, the legal system can be a vehicle for justice if it is allowed to operate as intended. But there are factors stacked against this occurring. Firstly, characters must be willing to seek its protection (and that willingness will also depend on an awareness of the legal system, and a belief that it could work for them - we shall see how some characters suggest that the legal system appears to 'belong' to the upper classes) and also be able to pay for it. Should this fragile combination of circumstances arise, the whole edifice is easily toppled by characters, such as Saccard and Mme Chanteau, who obstruct the operation of the legal system for their own purposes, and against whom there seems precious little chance of redress or punishment.

⁷⁰ This is true of Mme Chanteau here, and Aristide Saccard as we saw earlier, though he is eventually caught and punished in *Argent*. The 3000F fine and the opportunity to choose exile in Belgium seems derisory in light of the effect of his actions on the shareholders in the Banque Universelle, amongst whom financial ruin, broken family relationships and suicide have resulted (*Argent* 389). In the opening novel of the cycle, Pierre Rougon seeks information about the rights of illegitimate children to inherit their parents' property, and upon learning, to his disgust, that his bastard brother and sister have rights, he deliberately sets out to circumvent the Code, and succeeds (*Fortune* 54).

The more detailed examples we have seen in the first part of this chapter do underline the potential of the legal system to live up to the promise of its name and deliver justice. We have observed, however, that much militates against this happening. But so far, the failure of the legal system lies not with the laws themselves but instead with the use to which characters put the system. Hints that all might not be quite as neutral as we have generously conceded at this point, will become only too apparent from the next sections which examine the ways in which the legal system is discredited - albeit by association - firstly by those who represent it in *Les Rougon-Macquart*, and secondly by the ideological use to which the regime of the Second Empire puts the legal system.

The representatives of the legal system

We start this section with the idea that, at a pinch, the legal system (in spite of its property bias) could be a neutral factor in the novels. What this section aims to illustrate is that the depiction of the creators (legislators) and representatives of the legal system discredits it, and invites us to see a negative slant reflected on the legal system itself.⁷¹

The main source of evidence for this section is in the two key novels from *Les Rougon-Macquart* for the legal system, namely *Excellence* and *Bête*. For the purposes of our study, the representatives of the legal system are divided into several classes. The first group contains legislators, parliamentarians and politicians. The second is that of judges and magistrates. The third group are the legal practitioners, who include advocates, lawyers, notaries and others involved in the administration of the legal system such as bailiffs and members of the police force. The objective is to see which characteristics and personal qualities or faults are given to these characters, and

⁷¹ This is further underlined by a pattern of an ironic use of legal imagery throughout the novels which appears to make clear the connection between representatives of the legal system and hypocrisy. For example, in *Terre* there are repeated references to M. Charles' appearance as a 'magistrat retraité' which could be seen to associate the legal system with the hypocrisy of a brothel-keeper who espouses high moral standards. Another example is Baptiste, the deviant butler (*Curée*) who is often described in terms of legal imagery, including the adjectives associated with the representatives of the legal system

what we can infer from these patterns (as clear patterns there are!) about the presentation of the legal system in the novels. It should be noted that our interest is not so much in an exhaustive catalogue of these characters but more in establishing the types created by Zola to represent the legal system.

Legislators, parliamentarians and politicians

Our first group of representatives of the legal system are the law-makers, the legislators - who are the parliamentarians and politicians. From Napoléon III to the local *député* M. de Chédeville (*Terre*) a broad range of political figures appears in the novels. Whilst our interest here is principally in the characters created by Zola rather than his presentation of historical characters, such as Napoléon III, a few remarks should be made about the head of state as he appears in *Les Rougon-Macquart*.

Zola's depiction of the Emperor is considered sympathetic by the critics, particularly in *Débâcle* where his illness and the power struggles within his entourage in Paris are offered as mitigating features in the mismanagement of the campaign against Prussia.⁷² This is not to say that the cycle lacks characters who are unsympathetic towards the head of state.⁷³

such as 'grave', 'digne' and 'sévère', which, as we shall soon see, are anything but accurate. A similar treatment attaches to both Lisa Quenu and Félicité Rougon.

⁷² Elliott M. Grant congratulates Zola for not vilifying the Emperor, and for presenting the head of state's physical problems. 'His moral anguish, equally great, is also rendered by Zola, who suggests that Napoléon III acquiesced in a military policy of which he did not wholly approve and which he possibly realized would lead to disaster. The over-all picture is of a vacillating, unsure man too afflicted with physical pain to resist the pressures coming from his wife and ministers in Paris. That he bore much responsibility for the catastrophe is true, but Zola does not heap abuse upon him' (*Emile Zola* (New York: Twayne, 1966), p.159). Both Maurice Descotes (*Le personnage de Napoléon III dans "Les Rougon-Macquart"* (Paris: Lettres Modernes, 1970), p.70) and Guy Robert (*Emile Zola* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1952), p.66) consider that the response to the character of the Emperor emanating from *Débâcle* is one of pity.

⁷³ Less sympathetic assessments are made by other characters in the cycle, particularly those from the lower social classes. For example, Lantier irritates Poisson, the supporter of the regime, with a series of specious rumours about the emperor. He shows Poisson one of the books from his eclectic library: 'Il lui mettait sous le nez un petit livre imprimé à Bruxelles : *les Amours de Napoléon III*, orné de gravures. On y racontait, entre autres anecdotes, comment l'empereur avait séduit la fille d'un cuisinier, âgée de treize ans; et l'image représentait Napoléon III, les jambes nues, ayant gardé seulement le grand cordon de la Légion d'honneur, poursuivant une gamine qui se dérobaît à sa luxure' (*Assommoir* 605). Gavard has a collection of similar publications: 'tous les livres politiques défendus à la frontière, les pamphlets de Bruxelles, les histoires scandaleuses des Bonaparte, les caricatures étrangères ridiculisant l'empereur' (*Ventre* 886). In a later attempt to insinuate himself with the Poisson

His early appearance in *Curée* shows his marked interest in women, a pastime confirmed in *Excellence*.⁷⁴ In spite of his declining physical health, the emperor still manages to ogle Renée Saccard with lust.⁷⁵ That novel also shows the emperor as a political operator - there are clear indicators of the political patronage which informed the Second Empire, and which explains the thrall in which he held members of both parliamentary houses.

Just as Renée Saccard is one of the 'colonnes' of Second Empire *mondaine* society,⁷⁶ the entire regime is symbolised by Napoléon III, and this connection is made clear in *Débâcle* where the head of state's deteriorating health parallels the inexorable defeat of the French forces at Sedan. In spite of the appearance of absolute power attached to the head of state, Maurice Descotes suggests that Napoléon III incarnates in the novels 'la dérision de la toute-puissance'.⁷⁷

Zola's most detailed portrait of a politician is that of Eugène Rougon, who has the sixth novel of the *Rougon-Macquart* cycle to himself. He makes sporadic appearances in *Curée* where his ascendancy from mediocre provincial lawyer to the powerful Minister of the Interior has begun.

couple, Lantier is willing to draw back from his earlier criticism of the head of state: 'Il ne blaguait plus le sergent de ville en l'appelant Badingue, allait jusqu'à lui concéder que l'empereur était un bon garçon, peut-être' (*Assommoir* 650). The opinion of Jésus-Christ is much less measured: "'Une canaille tout de même, qui bat sa femme et qui n'a jamais aimé sa mère!'" (*Terre* 416). This is not to say that the Emperor lacks fans and defenders amongst the common people. The peasantry, for example, was traditionally bonapartist. In *Terre*, M. de Chédeville's alleged friendship with the Emperor enhances his status as the local deputy.

⁷⁴ Maurice Descotes makes the interesting suggestion that in the sexual arena Napoléon III is far from the dominant party: 'Illusions de conquêtes pour le don juan couronné puisque, finalement, il paie toujours, d'une façon ou d'une autre. Au surplus, ce sont les femmes qui le prennent, et non lui qui prend les femmes' (Descotes, p.49).

⁷⁵ His 'pas pénible et vacillant' and 'marche traînante' are referred to (*Curée* 439). When she sees him later in the novel, 'Renée trouva l'empereur vieilli', and once again mention is made of his poor health: 'la bouche s'ouvrait plus mollement' and 'le visage vague' feature in the description (596).

⁷⁶ At the opulent Ministry ball, Renée's shoulders attract particular attention and respect: 'Et les intimes s'inclinaient, avec un discret sourire d'intelligence, rendant hommage à ces belles épaules, si connues du tout Paris officiel, et qui étaient les fermes colonnes de l'Empire' (*Curée* 475).

⁷⁷ Descotes, p.74. He explains earlier in his monograph that the Emperor was rendered powerless by the conflicting demands of his various supporters. 'Au total, vu de l'extérieur, cet empereur tout-puissant apparaît, tel Gulliver, comme enserré par mille liens, prisonnier de ses compromissions multiples et contradictoires, prisonnier de tous les gages qu'il a donnés aux intérêts, aux avidités et aux convoitises' (p.44).

Aristide, en venant à Paris, avait surtout compté sur Eugène qui, après avoir été un des agents les plus actifs du coup d'Etat, était à cette heure une puissance occulte, un petit avocat dans lequel naissait un grand homme politique. (*Curée* 360)

It is in *Excellence* that the waxing and waning of Rougon's political fortunes are charted in more detail. Like Napoléon III, as we saw above, the Minister practises a form of political patronage which inspires personal loyalty from the members of his 'bande', a group of opportunists on whose support and presence Rougon appears to rely, in spite of the lack of respect he has for them.⁷⁸

Pourtant ces familiers, qu'il tenait en une si médiocre estime, il avait le besoin de les voir, de régner sur eux; un besoin de maître jaloux, pleurant en secret des moindres infidélités. Même, au fond de son cœur, il était attendri par leur sottise, il aimait leurs vices. Ils semblaient à présent faire partie de son être, ou plutôt c'était lui qui se trouvait lentement absorbé; à ce point qu'il restait comme diminué les jours où ils s'écartaient de sa personne.⁷⁹

Rougon helps his friends into either well-paid, undemanding jobs or high-profile, powerful positions, depending on their preference,⁸⁰ whether or not they are qualified to perform them.⁸¹ He procures government support for their personal projects,

⁷⁸ They work towards their own goals by cultivating support for Rougon in Paris. Clorinde takes the lead and sends the 'bande' out to convert the city to Rougon: 'Paris entier fut pris dans cette intrigue. Au fond des quartiers perdus, il y avait des gens qui soupiraient après le triomphe de Rougon, sans savoir au juste pourquoi. La bande, dix à douze personnes, tenait la ville' (*Excellence* 187). 'C'était comme malgré lui qu'on travaillait à sa fortune. Il s'agissait de le pousser quand même, de l'asseoir à quelque sommet, violemment. Ensuite, on compterait' (191).

⁷⁹ *Excellence* 192. 'Toute la bande était là, les amis qu'il subissait, ceux dont il avait peur, ceux pour lesquels il éprouvait une véritable affection, le poussant, l'acculant à un dénouement immédiat' (204). After his return to power his attitude changes: 'Il oubliait ses mépris secrets, en arrivait à les trouver très intelligents, très forts, à son image. Il voulait surtout qu'on le respectât en eux, il les défendait avec emportement, comme il aurait défendu les dix doigts de ses mains' (219). He does, however, express to Clorinde his frustration at their demands: "Ils sont une douzaine d'un joli poids sur mes épaules! Tant qu'ils n'auront pas ma peau, ils ne se déclareront pas satisfaits. [...] Malgré tout le mal que mes amis disent de moi, je passe mes journées à solliciter pour eux une foule de faveurs" (276).

⁸⁰ A typical example is when a position falls vacant for an inspector which Rougon must fill: "Oh! une place sans importance. Six mille francs. Il est vrai qu'il n'y a absolument rien à faire." (221) The minister remarks: "On m'a proposé déjà un tas de monde. Ça m'ennuie de nommer des gens que je ne connais pas" (229). He offers it to Béjuin, a member of the 'bande' who happens to be in Rougon's office at the time. Du Poizat helped Rougon become elected to the *Assemblée législative*. 'Puis, après le coup d'Etat, Rougon à son tour travailla pour Du Poizat, en le faisant nommer sous-préfet à Bressuire' (*Excellence* 37). Du Poizat's despotic rule as *préfet* and the suspicion over his involvement in the death of his father, are instrumental in bringing down the Minister (325-326). For the young M. d'Escorailles, scion of a powerful Plassans family, Rougon secures a position as 'auditeur au Conseil d'Etat' (47). He ensures Delestang's promotion to Minister of Agriculture and Commerce (273).

⁸¹ Auguste Jobelin, the son of one of the 'bande', seems unlikely to receive his *baccalauréat* which is the qualification for entry into the civil service. 'Rougon avait promis de le prendre dans son ministère, bien que le diplôme de bachelier fût exigé de tous les employés. "Eh bien, c'est cela, amenez-le," répondit-il. "Je passerai par-dessus les formalités. Je chercherai un biais"' (*Excellence* 227). This

ranging from the granting of a railway concession to the loyal deputy Kahn,⁸² to the series of small appointments he arranges for Mme Correur and her friends,⁸³ or uses his powers as Minister of the Interior (command over the police) to remove obstacles to his friends' material gain.⁸⁴ Decorations and titles are conferred on members of the 'bande' as a matter of course.⁸⁵

The relationship between Rougon and his supporters is symbiotic, as becomes apparent to Napoléon III during a conversation with his 'number two'.

Rougon venait de livrer tout le secret de sa fidélité; le jour où il aurait laissé dormir son crédit, son crédit serait mort; et, malgré le scandale, malgré le mécontentement et la trahison de sa bande, il n'avait qu'elle, il ne pouvait s'appuyer que sur elle, il se trouvait condamné à l'entretenir en santé, s'il voulait se bien porter lui-même. Plus il obtenait pour ses amis, plus les faveurs semblaient énormes et peu méritées, et plus il était fort.⁸⁶

particular example is referred to by the Emperor who gently chastises Rougon over the appointment. "Cela n'a pas d'importance, je le sais. Mais si vous vous doutiez du tapage que ces choses soulèvent! ... On fâche tout le monde avec ces bêtises. C'est de la bien mauvaise politique" (292).

⁸² 'Il s'agissait d'un chemin de fer de Niort à Angers, [...] cette voie ferrée passait à Bressuire, où il [Kahn] possédait des hauts fourneaux dont elle devait décupler la valeur; jusque-là, les transports restaient difficiles, l'entreprise végétait' (*Excellence* 40). Kahn's 'activité prodigieuse pour obtenir la concession' is supplemented by Rougon's support, but the whole issue threatens to become a pawn in the power struggle between Rougon and M. de Marsy (Rougon's predecessor at the Ministry of the Interior) who wants to be cut in to what promises to be a very profitable deal, and therefore stalls the procedure. Rougon officially opens the work for the new line, explicitly linking the government to the business venture (262-263). This connection between the Second Empire and the business world will be seen in more detail below, in the discussion of the relationship between Rougon and Saccard.

⁸³ Mme Correur has a file full of requests with which Rougon has promised to help her. 'Il y avait là des lettres, des projets, des pétitions de toutes les écritures et de toutes les orthographes : demandes de bureaux de tabac, demandes de bureaux de timbres, demandes de secours, de subventions, de pensions, d'allocations' (*Excellence* 228).

⁸⁴ The two principal examples of this are, firstly, the arrest of Mme Correur's brother, a republican notary whose wife threatens to have the sister cut out of the brother's will. We look more closely at this in the section below on the ideological use of the legal system. The second example is when Rougon orders a police search of a convent to which the Charbonnells' relative left a legacy they had hoped to receive themselves. Interfering with a religious order offends the morality with which the ruling classes claim to be associated, and it marks the beginning of the end of this phase of Rougon's political career. 'On lui aurait tout pardonné, ses abus de pouvoir, les appétits de sa bande, l'étranglement du pays; mais avoir envoyé des gendarmes retourner les paillasses des sœurs, c'était un crime si monstrueux, que les dames, à la cour, affectaient un petit tremblement sur son passage' (*Excellence* 324).

⁸⁵ 'M. d'Escorailles, malgré sa grande jeunesse, avait reçu la croix de chevalier huit jours auparavant; M. Kahn et M. Bouchard étaient officiers; le colonel venait enfin d'être nommé commandeur' (*Excellence* 222). Rougon has some honours to spare in the latest round of awards for mayors, and remembers that Béjuin qualifies: "Cela va tout seul, alors!" dit le ministre, ravi de cette occasion de pousser un des siens' (*ibid.*).

⁸⁶ *Excellence* 293. When he loses their support entirely, he feels it acutely. 'Lui, si fort, était lié à ces imbéciles par le long travail de leur fortune commune. Ils emportaient chacun un peu de lui, en se retirant' (327).

The only limit he appears to place on his largesse is that he will not be implicated in anything he considers related to vice.⁸⁷ This complements Rougon's view that his chastity is the key to his success.⁸⁸

Enfin, il fit un retour sur lui-même. Il était le gardien des lois. Il ne pouvait abuser de son pouvoir pour encourager le vice. Sans la vertu, un gouvernement lui semblait impossible. Et il termina en mettant ses adversaires au défi de trouver dans son administration un seul acte de népotisme, une seule faveur due à l'intrigue.⁸⁹

We shall see soon enough just how easy a challenge this is to accomplish, not only in the case of Rougon, but in relation to other representatives of the legal system, who use their position to advance the careers and finances of their friends and associates.⁹⁰ Françoise Naudin-Patriat paints a gloomy picture of the political world in the novels:

On aurait pu croire la politique à l'abri des intérêts particuliers; or, elle est contaminée par le milieu des affaires qui y voit un moyen, parmi d'autres, de servir et de protéger ses intérêts; [...] La chose politique, tout en étant présentée comme le lieu de l'intérêt général, participe, avec la complicité des gouvernants, à la valse de l'argent, des profits, des pots-de-vin.⁹¹

⁸⁷ When Mme Bouchard attempts to seduce the Minister to promote the interests of a young lover, Rougon's response is typically brutal. Pushing her away, he lectures her: 'Ce fut un sermon en forme, avec de très belles paroles. Elle offensait toutes les lois divines et humaines; elle marchait sur un abîme, déshonorait le foyer domestique' (*Excellence* 231).

⁸⁸ His gang is aware of this, so they are not surprised that he did not succumb to the entreaties of a beautiful woman sent to encourage him to reconsider his decision to resign (*Excellence* 21). He continually warns Delestang to be on his guard against women (34-36). In this general approach, Rougon reflects the attitude of the abbé Faujas when his mother offers to protect his privacy should he wish to accept Marthe Mouret's advances: "Non, jamais, jamais," dit-il avec un orgueil âpre. "Vous vous trompez, mère ... Les hommes chastes sont les seuls forts" (*Conquête* 1079). For Angus Wilson, Muffat's downfall in *Nana* is linked to sex: '[He] is the symbol of all that Zola believed that sexual passion could do to degrade the powerful will and the adult intellect. Only Eugène Rougon, spurning Clorinde, whom he longed to possess, is saved.' (*Emile Zola: an introductory study of his novels* (New York: William Morrow, 1952), pp.46-47).

⁸⁹ *Excellence* 232. Rougon is exceptional in his sexual morality, as we shall see. Françoise Naudin-Patriat sees a connection between the debauchery of the Second Empire and its collapse. 'En extrapolant des cas personnels vers le régime tout entier, l'Empire semble s'écrouler parce qu'il n'a pas su maintenir chez ses élites les vertus nécessaires à un exercice prolongé du pouvoir' (Naudin-Patriat, p.227).

⁹⁰ Although laid on with a trowel in *Excellence*, a French audience accustomed to *le piston* would be less shocked by the pattern of patronage and nepotism than an Anglo-Saxon one, who would see in it corruption on a grand scale, rather than simply the French way of things.

⁹¹ Naudin-Patriat, p.2. The connection between politics and business is further strengthened by the number of politicians with a background in business, as Aimé Dupuy points out: 'Mais Zola exprimait ainsi la vérité même de l'Histoire: dans ses Notes de travail, on peut lire à ce sujet: "L'Empire n'a pas eu un homme d'Etat. Il n'a eu que des hommes d'affaires"' (Dupuy, p. 56).

Rougon craves the company and physical presence of the 'bande' and they see in him a way to realise their ambitions and their greed.⁹² Their loyalty is only valid as long as he keeps distributing favours and remains useful to them. When the Minister falls from power the 'bande' transfer their support to Delestang, Rougon's successor.⁹³ In an outrageous attack on their former protector, Kahn and Jobelin encourage the others to believe that Rougon did too little too late for them.⁹⁴

They conclude that Rougon's patronage compromises them, and decide to abandon him. Clorinde steers them towards her husband, Delestang, whose political outlook they adopt effortlessly. They turn on their former supporter, and work actively to bring Rougon down.⁹⁵ Delestang, under Clorinde's guidance, grants their wishes just as Rougon did.⁹⁶

One of the relationships of political patronage which spans several novels in the cycle is that between Eugène Rougon and his brother, the financier Aristide Saccard.⁹⁷

When Saccard arrives in Paris, Rougon secures a job for him, but makes clear that his ongoing support is conditional on Saccard's continued good behaviour and that he compromises neither the family reputation nor Rougon's career.⁹⁸ As with any of his

⁹² They view their relationship with Rougon in a contractual light, as the following grumbles suggest: "[I]l a pris des engagements envers nous", "Dites qu'il a contracté une dette", "Oui, oui, une dette, c'est le mot", and "[N]ous sommes volés" (152). They expect that their efforts on his behalf will be rewarded. Rougon also views himself as indebted to the 'bande': 'Il n'ignorait pas le dévouement et la propagande de ses amis; il récompenserait jusqu'aux plus humbles d'entre eux' (215). He is relieved by the opportunity presented by the attempted assassination of the Emperor by Italian insurgents. He sees the consequent panic as calling for a strong man such as himself to take charge of the situation: 'Il avait trop de dettes, il voulait payer tout' (213).

⁹³ All too quickly the 'grand homme' becomes the 'gros homme' once the gang switches allegiance to Delestang. "Est-ce que vous avez vu le gros homme, aujourd'hui?" demanda le colonel. Maintenant, Rougon n'était plus "le grand homme" (*Excellence* 305).

⁹⁴ "Enfin, depuis cinq mois, il a commis des actes monstrueux ..." "Oui, oui," interrompit le colonel, "toutes sortes de passe-droits, d'injustices, d'abusurdités ... Il abuse, il abuse, vraiment" (*Excellence* 305).

⁹⁵ 'La bande affectait des allures de secte religieuse apportant le salut. Maintenant, elle complotait d'une façon ouverte le renversement du gros homme, pour le plus grand bien du pays' (*Excellence* 318).

⁹⁶ 'Toute la bande était luisante, florissante. Elle s'engraissait déjà d'un autre embonpoint' (*Excellence* 345). Rougon observes them fawning over Delestang: 'C'était la lente prise de possession des familiers, qui baissent les pieds, qui baissent les mains, avant de s'emparer des quatre membres. Et il leur appartenait déjà' (346).

⁹⁷ Rougon becomes established in Paris in *Fortune*, and in *Curée* he helps Saccard settle into life in the capital. In *Argent* they once again come into contact, though this time with explicit antagonism.

⁹⁸ He has similar qualms about their sister, Sidonie. When asked about her by Saccard, Rougon 'se contenta de répondre qu'il ne la voyait jamais, qu'il la savait fort intelligente, un peu compromettante,

other 'clients', Rougon is willing to use his reputation and influence to launch his brother socially,⁹⁹ and to guarantee government support for some of Saccard's business projects.¹⁰⁰ According to Françoise Naudin-Patriat, this typifies the interdependent relationship between politics and the business world under the Second Empire:

Cette facilité avec laquelle certains politiciens sont prêts à mêler leur fonction à n'importe quelle affaire ou à monnayer éventuellement les décisions qui relèvent de leur compétence est bien connue des milieux d'affaires. Ceux qui, parmi les hommes d'affaires, sont mêlés de près aux spéculations boursières savent qu'ils pourront, sans doute, obtenir des renseignements précieux concernant les fluctuations de valeurs, à condition d'y mettre le prix.¹⁰¹

Their fraternal relationship is not, however, an easy one, and by the end of the series it has disintegrated almost completely, Rougon deciding not to mount an attempt to rescue Saccard and his Banque Universelle. Saccard's scams and dodgy dealing have reached a level where Rougon's own career is threatened, as the struggle between the Catholic and Jewish financial institutions in *Argent* has implications for the government's foreign policy as regards the Roman question.

Mais la vérité était que Rougon venait de prendre l'énergique parti d'en finir, avec ce membre gangrené de sa famille, qui, depuis des années, le gênait, dans

peut-être' (*Curée* 372). This does not stop him from using her for a secret mission in England. 'Son frère le ministre profita de son voyage pour la charger d'une commission délicate' (588).

⁹⁹ For example, when he learns of Saccard's impending marriage he is enthusiastic: "'Tu viens me demander pour témoin, n'est-ce pas? Compte sur moi ... S'il le faut, je mènerai à ta noce tout le côté droit du Corps législatif; ça te poserait joliment...'" (*Curée* 384). He also makes an appearance at an important party (a 'bal travesti' no less) at Saccard's home, and Rougon 'faisait le bonhomme, consentait à lui [Saccard] rendre le service de paraître l'aimer beaucoup' (550). He announces that he has secured a position for Maxime as 'auditeur au Conseil d'Etat' (551) and that he hopes to be asked to be a witness at his nephew's upcoming wedding. He indulges Saccard further before leaving the party: 'Il venait de faire trois ou quatre fois le tour du salon au bras de son frère, donnant quelques poignées de mains, saluant les dames. Jamais il ne s'était tant compromis pour Saccard' (554).

¹⁰⁰ Rougon informs Saccard of developments in the rebuilding of Paris: 'Lui s'en tira la conscience nette, les poches pleines, grâce à son frère Eugène, qui voulut bien intervenir' (*Curée* 416). When Saccard and Toutin-Laroche found the *Crédit viticole*, more assistance is forthcoming from Rougon: 'Eugène, en cette circonstance, avait encore donné un bon coup de main à son frère. Grâce à lui, le gouvernement autorisa la compagnie, et la surveilla avec une grande bonhomie' (417).

¹⁰¹ Naudin-Patriat, p.18. She suggests later on that a lack of integrity unites the two groups and reflects their common interest. 'Quant à la probité, elle n'est ni courante ni parmi les détenteurs de charges officielles ni dans les milieux d'affaires' (p.251). Alain Plessis suggests that the historical situation was not as dark as Zola suggested: 'A number of prominent figures of the Empire seem to have been involved in this widespread racketeering, and Morny came to symbolize these men, who skilfully exploited their political situation for the purpose of participating in all manner of *affaires*. [...] Napoléon III's ministers were often honest men, and the regime, on the whole, was tarnished by fewer scandals than the July Monarchy. But this was precisely because it now seemed normal for large scale business activities to be intimately connected with politics' (Plessis, p.80).

d'éternelles terreurs d'accidents malpropres, et qu'il préférait enfin trancher violemment. Si la catastrophe arrivait, il était résolu à laisser aller les choses. Puisqu'il n'obtiendrait jamais de Saccard son exil, le plus simple n'était-il pas de le forcer à s'expatrier lui-même, en lui facilitant la fuite, après quelque bonne condamnation? Un brusque scandale, un coup de balai, ce serait fini. (*Argent* 338)

Rougon's initial support for his brother is expressed in terms of the interests of the regime: "Les hommes comme toi sont précieux," he told Saccard. "Nous comptons bien choisir nos bons amis parmi les plus affamés" (*Curée* 363). Whilst responsibility for much of the development in France under the Second Empire was abdicated by the government to reckless and talented individuals such as Saccard,¹⁰² Rougon shows that support can be withdrawn when the interests of the regime are threatened. The *carte* is not completely *blanche*. Up until that point, however, the government will protect its supporters.¹⁰³ The business sector and the government help each other, and in some cases it is the government which seeks the assistance of the financiers, just as they delegated responsibility for colonial expansion, for example, to entrepreneurs. In *Argent* we see the financier Gundermann being solicited by representatives of the government.¹⁰⁴

Some commentators have dismissed as farcical the relationship between Rougon and his gang. Its presentation in the novel is schematised and, in spite of its basis in fact, appears unreal.¹⁰⁵ Unlike the Darwinian struggle Saccard has with Gundermann in *Argent* where family ties and friendship count for nothing, in *Excellence* and the other

¹⁰² Legal regulation of the area was relaxed to allow entrepreneurs more freedom. 'Le cadre juridique de la société anonyme - base même de la croissance et de la spéculation - a été libéré de tout contrôle gouvernemental par les lois de 1863 et de 1867 qui ouvrent définitivement la carrière aux audaces de l'entreprise libre' (Jean Bouvier, 'L'Argent : roman et réalité', *Europe*, 468-469 (1968), 54-64, p.56).

¹⁰³ 'Le gouvernement protège ces hommes compromis dans des tripotages ou dans des affaires "véreuses" parce qu'ils lui apportent un fervent soutien et qu'ils sont trop liés au régime pour ne pas le compromettre dans un scandale public' (Naudin-Patriat, p.20).

¹⁰⁴ 'Par contre, les financiers sont en position de force vis-à-vis de l'Etat : les autorités politiques font preuve à leur égard d'une soumission certaine; à l'occasion, elles s'adressent à eux en qualité de quémandeurs. [...] [Gundermann] tient les gouvernements dans sa souveraine dépendance, réduisant les ministres au rang de commis. [...] Les historiens ont souligné la dépendance du gouvernement impérial vis-à-vis de la "féodalité financière"' (Naudin-Patriat, p.39).

¹⁰⁵ For Richard B. Grant the unrelieved negative presentation in the novel of those associated with politics means that *Excellence* cannot be considered a fair appraisal of the Second Empire. 'Since every political character in the book is either stupid or grossly immoral, all of the action, all of the history, is seen in the light of the motivations and characters of these people, by whose very presence everything is made cheap, sordid, stupid or evil' (Zola's "Son Excellence Eugène Rougon" : an historical and critical study (Durham: Duke University Press, 1960), p.117).

political novels in the cycle, they count for everything.¹⁰⁶ *Excellence* demonstrates Zola's desire to depict the prevalence of political patronage in the Second Empire as he saw it, perhaps with a small edge of satire in the observation.¹⁰⁷ Richard B. Grant suggests that another angle Zola wished to present was a parallel between Rougon and Napoléon III - both of whom surrounded themselves with a 'bande' in their quest for power.¹⁰⁸

The connection between Eugène Rougon and the regime is made clear in the novel, so his status as representative of the Second Empire is not in doubt.¹⁰⁹ As one of the representative politicians of the Second Empire, Rougon's ethical flexibility is an important characteristic for us to retain from the novel. He gives the baron Gouraud a good run for his money for the title of the Vicar of Bray of *Les Rougon-Macquart*.¹¹⁰ As his brother Saccard remarks in *Argent* :

'Ah! que Rougon prenne garde! il sera mangé, lui d'abord, balayé de ce pouvoir auquel il se cramponne, pour lequel il renie tout. C'est très malin, son jeu de bascule, les gages donnés un jour aux libéraux, l'autre jour aux autoritaires; mais, à ce jeu-là, on finit fatalement par se rompre le cou...' (*Argent* 385)

¹⁰⁶ 'Dans ces batailles de l'argent, sourdes et lâches, où l'on éventre les faibles, sans bruit, il n'y a plus de liens, plus de parenté, plus d'amitié: c'est l'atroce loi des forts, ceux qui mangent pour ne pas être mangés' (*Argent* 316).

¹⁰⁷ Elliott M. Grant sees the satire as being a strong one : 'The book contains a savage satire of the régime, in which petty politics, personal ambition, lack of genuine statesmanship, and harsh repression of the opposition are the dominant factors' (E.M. Grant, *Emile Zola*, p.79). He continues: '[T]he satire is effective. If Zola's purpose was to discredit the imperial régime of Napoléon III, he was eminently successful' (*ibid.*, p.81).

¹⁰⁸ 'Zola created a fictional group, headed by Rougon, that is reminiscent of the historical clique headed by the future Emperor, each seeking a way to arrive at power' (R.B. Grant, *Excellence*, p.110).

¹⁰⁹ Rougon claims : "Moi, j'ai poussé avec l'Empire; je l'ai fait et il m'a fait..." (*Excellence* 78). Gilquin, on the other hand, demands some credit for his support of Rougon in hard times : "Rougon! c'est moi qui l'ai fait!" (93).

¹¹⁰ 'Tout le baron Gouraud tenait dans cette courte biographie : fait baron par Napoléon Ier, en récompense de biscuits avariés fournis à la Grande Armée, il avait tour à tour été pair sous Louis XVIII, sous Charles X, sous Louis-Philippe, et il était sénateur sous Napoléon III. C'était un adorateur du trône, des quatre planches dorées recouvertes de velours; peu lui importait l'homme qui s'y trouvait assis' (*Curée* 395). Another opportunist is M. de Plouguern : 'Sous Louis-Philippe, envoyé à la Chambre par le Finistère, il fut un des députés légitimistes qui firent le pèlerinage de Belgrave-Square; et il donna sa démission, à la suite du vote de flétrissure, dont ses compagnons et lui furent frappés. Plus tard, après les journées de février, il montra une tendresse soudaine pour la république, qu'il acclama vigoureusement sur les bancs de la Constituante. Maintenant, depuis que l'empereur lui avait assuré au Sénat une retraite méritée, il était bonapartiste' (*Excellence* 79-80).

He moves with the circumstances, from embodying the authoritarian regime to defending its more liberal incarnation at the end of the novel.¹¹¹ His tune has changed from anticlerical and authoritarian to Catholic liberalism. Maurice Descotes remarks that even in the context of the Second Empire which was marked by political opportunism, Rougon's change of political colours is remarkable, as attested by the admiring glances shared by Clorinde and M. de Marsy, two other accomplished schemers.¹¹²

Françoise Naudin-Patriat observes that in this dramatic change of position, Rougon has not been hindered by any genuine beliefs. He will do whatever is required to retain power.¹¹³ He does not have a point of view, rather he has a need - namely for power. Unlike those around him who focus on the trappings of power, Rougon likes it for its own sake.¹¹⁴ A recurrent motif in the novel is the ideal community which Rougon fantasises about creating in the Landes, and which he will rule by the whip.¹¹⁵

One of Rougon's colleagues is the Attorney-General, Delcambre, who appears in *Argent*. The interest for us is in the abyss between his professional persona as dignified pillar of the Second Empire judiciary and aspects of his personal behaviour. This hypocrisy is presented in *Les Rougon-Macquart* as one of the key characteristics of the bourgeois characters in the novels and also of those connected with the regime.

¹¹¹ 'Dans la poussée des hommes du second empire, Rougon affichait depuis longtemps des opinions autoritaires. Son nom signifiait répression à outrance, refus de toutes les libertés, gouvernement absolu' (*Excellence* 218).

¹¹² 'Dans l'hierarchie des valeurs établies par ceux dont s'entoure Napoléon III, un reniement aussi total, aussi éhonté, est considéré comme un exploit' (Descotes, p.34). 'Les regards de M. de Marsy et de Clorinde s'étant rencontrés, ils eurent tous deux un hochement de tête; ils avouaient la victoire du grand homme' (*Excellence* 367).

¹¹³ 'Ceux qui ont, malgré tout, des opinions et des convictions personnelles en font le sacrifice, pour peu que les nécessités politiques du moment les y obligent; ainsi, Eugène Rougon se fait le chantre des mesures libérales et exalte la religion en tant que guide spirituel des hommes d'Etat, lui qui fut partisan des méthodes autoritaires et dont l'anticléricalisme était connu' (Naudin-Patriat, p.225). His lust for power is an important aspect of his character and has been studied in detail by critics such as Richard B. Grant.

¹¹⁴ 'C'était, chez lui, un amour du pouvoir pour le pouvoir, dégagé des appétits de vanité, de richesses, d'honneurs' (*Excellence* 131). He responds favourably when people comment on his strength of character. 'Il était coquet de sa force, comme une femme l'est de sa grâce' (49). Given his 'besoins de domination' (131), it is ironic that he spends the weeks when he is sidelined from government writing a massive treatise comparing the freedoms available under the French and English constitutions (132).

¹¹⁵ He dreams of being the 'roi absolu' of the community (*Excellence* 41). 'Il rêvait d'être le maître chez lui, voilà tout. Et, fatalement, il revint à son idée d'une ferme, dans laquelle toutes les bêtes lui obéiraient. C'était son idéal, avoir un fouet et commander, être supérieur, plus intelligent et plus fort' (42). He explains his plans to the Emperor, who is reticent to grant his approval (171-172).

Whilst an extreme example of the gulf between reality and appearance, the two sides of Delcambre underline in dramatic fashion an important point in the presentation of representatives of the legal system, namely the vast difference between the moral positions they promote publicly and their practice in private.¹¹⁶

Behind the haughty and glacial bearing of the man poised for promotion to Minister of Justice lurks none other than the 'bête humaine', which is revealed during the scuffle with Saccard over the baronne Sandorff.¹¹⁷ As he approaches the flat where he is set to surprise the lovers, he appears to be his professional self:

Le procureur général Delcambre, personnellement lié avec l'empereur, en passe de devenir ministre, était un homme maigre et jaune de cinquante ans, à la haute taille solennelle, à la face rase, coupée de plis profonds, d'une austère sévérité. Son nez dur, en bec d'aigle, semblait sans défaillance comme sans pardon. Et, lorsqu'il monta le perron, de son pas ordinaire, mesuré et grave, il avait toute sa dignité, son air froid des grands jours d'audience. (*Argent* 210)

The astonishing contrast is revealed in the fight which is started a few minutes later by Saccard's reference to Delcambre's legendary tight-fistedness.

Cette allusion à son avarice acheva d'enrager Delcambre. Il était méconnaissable, effroyable, comme si le bouc humain, tout le priape caché lui sortait de la peau. Ce visage, si digne et si froid, avait brusquement rougi, et il se gonflait, se tuméfiait, s'avavançait en un mufle furieux. L'empotement lâchait la brute charnelle, dans l'affreuse douleur de cette fange remuée.¹¹⁸

Whilst this may prove no more than Delcambre's essential animality (which is, after all, one of the key points Zola makes about all his characters - the blurred lines between animal, human, vegetable and machine are a feature of *Les Rougon-*

¹¹⁶ 'Et le procureur général Delcambre, froid, grave, imposant, futur ministre de la Justice, perd brusquement sous nos yeux toute cette majesté soutenue que requièrent les intérêts de son avancement et la composition de son personnage' (Henri Guillemin, *Présentation des "Rougon-Macquart"* (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), pp.358-359).

¹¹⁷ This confrontation featured in the discussion of Darwinism in Chapter One. When the magistrate discovers that his acknowledged mistress is having an affair with Saccard, he surprises them in the rooms he rented for the baronne Sandorff. The situation deteriorates into a physical fight between the two men. Saccard adds insult to injury by offering the notoriously stingy Delcambre bus fare as he sends him on his way.

¹¹⁸ *Argent* 212. As he waits in the ante-room before walking in on them, his potential for bestial behaviour is also clear. 'Cependant, il se lassait, un tic nerveux tirait toute la moitié gauche de son visage, dans la rage contenue dont le flot montait à son crâne. Le furieux mâle, aux appétits d'ogre, qu'il y avait en lui, caché derrière la glaciale sévérité de son masque professionnel, commençait à gronder sourdement, irrité de cette chair qu'on lui volait' (211).

Macquart) and the Darwinian nature of the conflict with Saccard hitherto, the revenge which Delcambre takes on his rival involves the use of his position at the head of the legal system. This, in turn, may serve to confirm the link we suggested earlier between the legal system and Darwinism.

Delcambre's use of his political power to further his personal ends is not the only example of this in *Les Rougon-Macquart*. We have already seen this clearly demonstrated by Eugène Rougon. In Delcambre's case the use of the legal system is even more explicit. Of course, Saccard is clearly guilty of various offences against companies and securities law, but the text underlines that it is Delcambre's personal vendetta against the man who humiliated him which motivates the prosecution of the case. Their scuffle merely continues in a forum other than the physical, as Maurice Descotes makes clear:

Le pugilat trouve son prolongement dans la vie publique puisque ce Delcambre devient ministre de la Justice : l'acharnement qu'il apporte, dans ses hautes fonctions, à poursuivre Saccard, après le krach de l'*Universelle*, n'est rien d'autre que l'expression de sa rancune de mâle trompé et humilié. (Descotes, p.50)

Vowing revenge, Delcambre leaves the scene of the fight with Saccard.¹¹⁹ He is duly promoted, and with the fall of the Banque Universelle, he sees his chance to settle the score.¹²⁰ He first ensures that there is no vestigial support for Saccard from his brother Rougon.

Dès lors, du moment où Rougon l'abandonnait, Saccard était perdu. Delcambre, qui le guettait depuis son arrivée au pouvoir, le tenait enfin sur la marge du Code, au bord même du vaste filet judiciaire, n'ayant plus qu'à trouver le prétexte pour lancer ses gendarmes et ses juges. (*Argent* 339)

Another personal grievance, that of Busch towards Saccard, provides just the excuse Delcambre seeks. Busch's objective is to cause a scandal centring on Saccard's

¹¹⁹ 'Il étendit le bras, il fit un serment. "Je jure que vous me payerez tout ça ... Oh! je vous retrouverai, prenez garde!"' (*Argent* 215).

¹²⁰ In addition to informing Saccard that Rougon is out to get him, Huret identifies Delcambre as another enemy Saccard has in the government : "Il paraît que Delcambre, le procureur général, vous exècre ... Et, ce que vous ignorez encore, l'empereur l'a nommé ce matin ministre de la Justice" (*Argent* 278).

illegitimate son, Victor.¹²¹ The prosecutor he meets tells him that there is no provision in the Code covering such a situation. During the course of the complaint, however, it becomes apparent to the prosecutor (none other than Delcambre's nephew) that Busch has lost money in the crash of the Banque Universelle.

Rien n'était plus simple, il n'avait qu'à déposer une plainte en escroquerie, car la justice, dès maintenant, se trouvait avertie de manœuvres frauduleuses, qui allaient entraîner la banqueroute. (*Argent* 339)

Saccard is arrested and held in custody while the case against him is prepared. He believes that Rougon was somehow instrumental in his arrest, but Mme Caroline tells him that it was Delcambre. Saccard is not surprised and acknowledges the Minister's personal vengeance:

La colère de Saccard tomba brusquement, il eut un sourire. 'Oh! celui-là se venge. [...] Oui, une vieille histoire entre nous ... Je sais d'avance que je serai condamné.'¹²²

Saccard's premonition is proved accurate. It is a high-publicity trial stage-managed by Delcambre, where Saccard and Hamelin are sentenced to five years imprisonment and a 3000F fine. Rougon helps out Saccard to an extent (saving himself the embarrassment of a brother in prison) with a technicality which allows the defendants twenty-four hours to exile themselves from France. Saccard heads to Belgium and Hamelin to Rome. It is a result which does Delcambre's career no harm, and through which he manages to satisfy a personal grievance.

The third detailed portrait of a politician in the novels is that of M. Camy-Lamotte (*Bête*). He shows very clearly the close connection between the legal system and the political establishment. A highly placed official in the Ministry of Justice, M. Camy-

¹²¹ 'Son plan était simplement de soulever un abominable scandale, en l'accusant de séquestration d'enfant, ce qui permettrait d'étaler les détails immondes du viol de la mère et de l'abandon du gamin. Un pareil procès fait au directeur de l'Universelle, dans l'émotion soulevée par la crise que traversait cette banque, cela remuerait certainement tout Paris; et Busch espérait encore que Saccard, à la première menace, payerait' (*Argent* 339). As we saw earlier, the threat of legal action cut no ice with Saccard before, and would surely be even less likely to have an effect on him, given his considerable problems in the wake of the collapse of the Banque Universelle.

¹²² *Argent* 385. 'D'ailleurs, on disait partout que le jugement était rendu à l'avance' (388).

Lamotte summons the *juge d'instruction* Denizet to Paris, and steers his investigation into the murder of Grandmorin:

Là, il [Denizet] avait longuement causé avec le secrétaire général, M. Camy-Lamotte, personnage considérable, ayant la haute main sur le personnel, chargé des nominations, en continuel rapport avec les Tuileries. C'était un bel homme, parti comme lui substitut, mais que ses relations et sa femme avaient fait nommer député et grand officier de la Légion d'honneur.¹²³

Camy-Lamotte's guiding hand on Denizet's investigation comes under his responsibility for preserving the good name of the government and its representatives.¹²⁴ Worried about unwelcome publicity stemming from a trial, Camy-Lamotte's masters instruct him to do whatever it takes to deal with the matter, and to take the fall should his efforts fail.¹²⁵ He is personally aware of the nature of the fallout from any inquiry into Grandmorin's death - as he knew the deceased 'jusque dans ses vices' (*Bête* 1078) - so Camy-Lamotte serves the imperial government by condoning a suppression of the truth.¹²⁶ We see a similar procedure in *Germinal* in the wake of the flooding of the mine.¹²⁷

¹²³ *Bête* 1077. Note how family connections have done his career no harm. Camy-Lamotte is something of a high-level trouble-shooter for the regime. 'Familiier des Tuileries, où sa fonction de secrétaire général du ministère de la Justice le faisait mander presque journellement, tout aussi puissant que le ministre, employé même à des besognes plus intimes, il savait combien cette affaire Grandmorin irritait et inquiétait, en haut lieu' (1114).

¹²⁴ Françoise Naudin-Patriat suggests that it is the brand image of the regime which Camy-Lamotte strives to protect. 'La justice préserve le respect dû à la mémoire du Président, une personnalité importante, membre d'une famille honorablement connue : à travers lui c'est l'Etat qu'elle sauve d'un scandale, c'est l'image de marque du régime qu'elle défend, c'est son autorité qu'elle raffermi' (Naudin-Patriat, p.222).

¹²⁵ 'Aussi avait-on exprimé au secrétaire général le désir formel d'en finir au plus vite, n'importe comment. Le ministre s'étant déchargé sur lui de cette affaire délicate, il se trouvait être l'unique maître de la décision à prendre, sous sa responsabilité, il est vrai : ce qui méritait examen, car il ne doutait pas de payer pour tout le monde, s'il se montrait maladroit' (*Bête* 1114).

¹²⁶ For Françoise Naudin-Patriat this explains Zola's detailed account of the Grandmorin investigation: '[C]'est l'occasion pour lui de montrer comment le fonctionnement de la justice peut être détourné de la recherche de la vérité par le Pouvoir quand il s'agit de protéger un haut personnage' (Naudin-Patriat, p.xix).

¹²⁷ The repercussions of the strike at Montsou have a greater effect than the regime is willing to acknowledge. It rides out the storm in the papers following the troops opening fire on the miners. 'L'empire, atteint en pleine chair par ces quelques balles, affectait le calme de la toute-puissance, sans se rendre compte lui-même de la gravité de sa blessure' (*Germinal* 1512). So, when the next disaster occurs, the government is on the defensive. There is an order to dismiss any employees suspected of involvement, in an 'épuration d'une haute prudence politique' (1549). The official report is a white-wash : 'Déjà, après une rapide enquête, le rapport de l'ingénieur du gouvernement concluait à une rupture naturelle du cuvelage' (*ibid.*) and the Company is happy to take a share of the blame for poor security rather than have the truth of the situation exposed, and run the risk of encouraging the martyrdom of the perpetrator.

Petitioned by Séverine to succeed Grandmorin as her protector, Camy-Lamotte puts two and two together, and, on the basis of a handwritten note (inviting Grandmorin to a rendez-vous with Séverine) found amongst the deceased's papers, he arrives at four, convinced of the Roubauds' guilt. With the writing sample he extracts from Séverine, confirming her as the writer of the note, Camy-Lamotte holds the one definitive piece of physical evidence which could identify Séverine and Roubaud as the killers of Grandmorin. The government's situation is already precarious in the run-up to the elections, and a high profile trial which exposes the pattern of sex crimes committed against young girls by one of the regime's creatures is too great a risk to run. So Camy-Lamotte makes a judgment call:

Au fond, rien ne valait la fatigue d'être juste. Il veillait uniquement au décor du régime qu'il servait. (*Bête* 1113)

This cynical attitude towards the truth and justice is seen elsewhere in the attitude of representatives of the legal system, as is the primacy of form ('décor') over content. Camy-Lamotte conceals the vital evidence from the investigating magistrate and eventually destroys it, concluding that there is no point putting Denizet on the right path if that path leads towards embarrassment for the regime.¹²⁸ Assessing as high the likelihood of awkward details about Grandmorin being revealed during a trial, particularly if the defence lawyer is an opponent of the regime, he hints to Denizet that the file should be closed. Given the implied promise of advancement and decoration, Denizet 'était prêt à faire aux nécessités gouvernementales le sacrifice de l'idée de justice' (*Bête* 1116). The matter dies a natural death, and repercussions eventually disappear from the opposition newspapers.¹²⁹

After the death of Séverine, however, the murder of Grandmorin can no longer be ignored, especially as Denizet makes an ingenious, yet inaccurate, connection between

¹²⁸ 'Jusque-là, le secrétaire général avait attendu, pour lui [Denizet] donner connaissance de la preuve écrite qu'il possédait; et, maintenant que sa conviction était faite, il se hâtait moins encore d'établir la vérité. A quoi bon ruiner la piste fausse de l'instruction, si la vraie piste devait conduire à des embarras plus grands?' (*Bête* 1115).

¹²⁹ Besides which, there is much more fertile material with which the 'presse de l'opposition' can attack the Second Empire. 'La pression du pouvoir, les violences des préfets lui fournissaient quotidiennement d'autres sujets d'articles indignés' (*Bête* 1134). These are topics of which there is plenty of evidence in *Excellence*.

the two murders. Press interest is rekindled and Denizet is once again called to Paris for a meeting with Camy-Lamotte, whom Denizet finds much changed:

Il le trouva debout, au milieu de son cabinet sévère, le visage amaigri, fatigué davantage; car il déclinait, envahi d'une tristesse dans son scepticisme, comme s'il eût pressenti, sous cet éclat d'apothéose, l'écroulement prochain du régime qu'il servait. (*Bête* 1315)

Racked with doubt as to the use to make of the letter from Séverine, the existence of which is known only to him (and Roubaud), Camy-Lamotte's reflections have been influenced by instructions from the Emperor which leave the Secretary-General to consider how best to serve the interests of the government:

Mais, la veille, l'empereur lui avait dit qu'il exigeait, cette fois, que la justice suivît son cours, en dehors de toute influence, même si son gouvernement devait en souffrir : un simple cri d'honnêteté, peut-être la superstition qu'un seul acte injuste, après l'acclamation du pays, changerait le destin. Et, si le secrétaire général n'avait pas pour lui de scrupules de conscience, ayant réduit les affaires de ce monde à une simple question de mécanique, il était troublé de l'ordre reçu, il se demandait s'il devait aimer son maître jusqu'au point de lui désobéir.¹³⁰

We cannot allow the Emperor's demand that justice must run its course to pass by unnoticed. The 'cette fois' suggests quite clearly that in other cases justice should not be allowed to so do, as was the case with the first inquiry into the death of Grandmorin. This is an important indicator of the connection between the regime and the legal system. Nelly Wilson sees parallels between the presentation of the legal system in this novel and in the later work, *Vérité*.¹³¹

A solution to Camy-Lamotte's dilemma comes through Denizet's convoluted explanation linking the two murders together as the work of Roubaud and Cabuche as accomplices. Explicitly acknowledging, at least to himself, that justice is to be

¹³⁰ *Bête* 1315. The suggestion here of Napoléon III's superstitious attitude towards the destiny of the dynasty is echoed by a pattern of references to fate and destiny in *Débâcle*. The 'cri d'honnêteté' seems to tally with Zola's generally sympathetic portrayal of the Emperor.

¹³¹ 'The unfavourable depiction of a politicised and corruptible judiciary is remarkably similar, albeit on a smaller scale, to that depicted in *Vérité*, notwithstanding the change in political regime, historical climate and social setting. In both fictions evidence is suppressed, juries are misdirected by judges, cover-up operations are mounted to further personal ambitions or, at best, to protect interests of State' (*Glasgow Colloque*, p.195).

sacrificed, Camy-Lamotte's resigned cynicism is particularly revealing of how the legal system is intimately intertwined with the interests of the Second Empire:

Et, d'ailleurs, puisque ce Roubaud se reconnaissait coupable, qu'importait à l'idée de justice qu'il fût condamné pour une version ou pour l'autre! [...] Puis, mon Dieu! la justice, quelle illusion dernière! Vouloir être juste, n'était-ce pas un leurre, quand la vérité est si obstruée de broussailles? Il valait mieux être sage, étayer d'un coup d'épaule cette société finissante qui menaçait ruine.¹³²

On this passage, Nelly Wilson remarks:

Camy-Lamotte's reflection on the impossibility of justice because justice depends on truth and truth is hard to come by is manifestly not to be taken as a valid expression of wisdom but, in this particular case, as a cynical consolation on the part of a lawyer-cum-politician who, unlike Denizet, actually *knows* the truth and knowingly withholds it in the interests of the State. Another triumph by and for the ruling class.¹³³

Camy-Lamotte burns the evidence, with a melancholic reflection on the uselessness of implicating himself in this way when the regime seems fated to destruction anyway, an attitude in which he appears to share something of the emperor's superstition.¹³⁴

We return to *Excellence* for the fullest account of parliamentarians in the cycle of novels. Whilst there are many brief appearances throughout *Les Rougon-Macquart* of politicians, it is only in the sixth novel of the series where the meetings of the legislative body are described. The novel opens and closes with scenes in the *Corps législatif*, the first session during the authoritarian period of the Second Empire and

¹³² *Bête* 1316. He later reflects: 'Certes, oui, une illusion, la vérité, la justice!' (1317). Camy-Lamotte feels obliged to shore up the Establishment, which contrasts with the suggestion in *Germinal* that it is time to push over the tottering social order, and also with the imagery in *Débâcle* used by Maurice of the amputation of the *corps social's* gangrenous limbs. As for truth, it is an elusive quality in the novel. For Camy-Lamotte and his superiors: 'On voulait connaître la vérité, pour la cacher mieux, s'il était nécessaire' (*Bête* 1078). For Roubaud on the stand: '[A] quoi bon dire la vérité, puisque c'était le mensonge qui était logique?' (1320). At one point in the trial, as Jacques gives his evidence there is a moment of silence during which 'c'était la vérité qui passait, muette' (1322). This is similar to Denizet's impression during his questioning of Lantier and the Roubauds: 'Il n'avait pas songé à utiliser ainsi cette confrontation; mais, par instinct de métier, il sentit, à cette minute, que la vérité passait dans l'air' (1097).

¹³³ *Glasgow Colloque*, p.191.

¹³⁴ 'Et, comme il approchait la lettre de la bougie, et qu'elle flambait, il fut pris d'une grande tristesse, d'un pressentiment de malheur: à quoi bon détruire cette preuve, charger sa conscience de cette action, si le destin était que l'Empire fût balayé, ainsi que la pincée de cendre noire, tombée de ses doigts?' (*Bête* 1317). In this action, Olivier Got sees the death of truth in the novel: 'Et cet holocauste égare définitivement la vérité, immolée au nom d'un autre labyrinthe, celui où se perd le Second Empire finissant' ('Dans le labyrinthe', in *Miscellanées Mitterand*, pp.159-165, p.164).

the second as the regime enters its liberal era. Our interest lies not so much with the political implications of the scenes depicted, but in what the text tells us about the attitude of the members of the house towards the regime, and where they see their duties lying.

In short, the legislators are singularly uninterested in their job, save for any opportunities which arise to show the depth of their dedication to the Emperor. This reflects the personal loyalty to the head of state (a result of the political patronage we mentioned earlier) and also the powerlessness of the Chamber. The political power in the Second Empire did not lie with the elected representatives. The constitutional provisions in operation under the Second Empire provided for a very limited role for the houses of parliament. Hand in hand with rigid repression of opponents to the regime, harsh censorship and control of the press, is the emasculation of the elected representatives. Georges Pradalié provides the following summary:

Nous pouvons conclure que l'Empire n'a pas eu de véritable liberté politique. Sur les trois assemblées législatives, deux sont étroitement contrôlées par le gouvernement puisque leurs membres sont directement ou indirectement nommés par lui, l'Assemblée du suffrage universel n'est pas élue librement.¹³⁵

We see among the proportion of the legislators who do bother to turn up, some chatting away to each other, some dozing through speeches and all of them scampering from the Chamber as soon as possible after voting in whichever way will please the Emperor.¹³⁶ Auguste Dezalay describes them as 'véritables machines à

¹³⁵ Georges Pradalié, *Le Second Empire* (Paris, P.U.F., 1969), p.33. He alludes to the practice of *candidature officielle* which we discuss below. Françoise Naudin-Patriat tells us that appointments to the Senate were for life. 'La fonction de sénateur apparaît dans *Les Rougon-Macquart* comme une charge honorifique que l'Empereur attribue, en récompense d'un témoignage de fidélité ou de ralliement au régime, à des hommes en général assez âgés' (Naudin-Patriat, p.186). All the signs point towards a docile body willing to exhibit its gratitude.

¹³⁶ 'Les uns se renversaient à demi sur les banquettes de velours rouge, les yeux vagues, sommeillant déjà. D'autres, pliés au bord de leurs pupitres comme sous l'ennui de cette corvée d'une séance publique, battaient doucement l'acajou du bout de leurs doigts' (*Excellence* 13). 'Le brouhaha continuait dans la salle' (14). This contrasts with an image used of comte Muffat: 'Le comte gardait une dignité si glacée, qu'on l'aurait cru à quelque séance du Corps législatif' (*Nana* 1115). Perhaps this is irony of the same class used in the descriptions of the predatory homosexual butler Baptiste (*Curée*), where he is compared to members of the legal profession.

voter'.¹³⁷ In the parliamentary session depicted in the opening chapter of the novel the main item on the agenda is the vote of funds for the imperial baptism.¹³⁸

Et il n'y eut pas de délibération. On vota tout de suite. Les deux articles du projet de loi, successivement mis aux voix, furent adoptés par assis et levé. A peine le président achevait-il la lecture de l'article, que, du haut en bas des gradins, tous les députés se levaient d'un bloc, avec un grand remuement de pieds, comme soulevés par un élan d'enthousiasme. [...] Le crédit de quatre cent mille francs était accordé à l'unanimité de deux cent trente-neuf voix. (*Excellence* 28-29)

After the vote, the Chamber empties, and the agenda moves on to bills of local interest. An atmosphere of indifference settles over the almost deserted Chamber.¹³⁹ The legislative body is shown as a group of eager to please yes-men who represent no resistance to the government. This is mirrored in the Ministers' attitude towards the Emperor.¹⁴⁰

One point which is worth mentioning here is the prevalence of members of the legal profession amongst the ranks of legislators under the Second Empire. The historian Alain Plessis has calculated that a considerable percentage of politicians came from a legal background. In the *Conseil d'Etat* it is an overwhelming eighty percent, in the *Corps législatif* a mere thirteen percent, whilst in the municipal *conseils généraux*, about thirty percent of the membership was comprised of notaries and lawyers.¹⁴¹

¹³⁷ Auguste Dezalay, *L'Opéra des "Rougon-Macquart" : essai de rythmologie romanesque* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1983), p.170.

¹³⁸ 'La séance, après s'être traînée dans des questions d'affaires fort ennuyeuses pour ces messieurs, allait prendre un intérêt capital' (*Excellence* 23).

¹³⁹ 'Bientôt, il n'y eut plus, sur les bancs, que les membres de bonne volonté, ceux qui n'avaient sans doute ce jour-là aucune affaire au-dehors; ils continuèrent leur somme interrompu, ils reprirent leur causerie au point où ils l'avaient laissée; et la séance s'acheva, ainsi qu'elle avait commencé, au milieu d'une tranquille indifférence. Même le brouhaha tombait peu à peu, comme si le Corps législatif se fût complètement endormi, dans un coin de Paris muet' (*Excellence* 29).

¹⁴⁰ A description of a Cabinet meeting shows that the Ministers also kowtow to the Emperor, in this instance over a budgetary matter: 'Tous les ministres approuvaient, après l'empereur' (*Excellence* 280). Françoise Naudin-Patriat highlights the power exercised by the head of state over ministerial careers which would explain their obedience: 'Les ministres sont nommés et renvoyés par l'Empereur, tout puissant pour faire et briser leur carrière' (Naudin-Patriat, p.178).

¹⁴¹ Plessis, p.35, p.37, p.51. Françoise Naudin-Patriat comments on the various 'juristes' in the political order: 'des avoués comme celui qui est désigné candidat officiel à la place de Kahn, *Son Excellence Eugène Rougon*; des avocats comme le député dont Léon Josserand est secrétaire, *Pot-Bouille*' (Naudin-Patriat, p.181).

The deputies are rather vain, and aware of being on show, which explains the considerable handwashing and hair combing ritual before entering the Chamber.¹⁴² There is clearly a performance occurring, with the characters assuming an appearance appropriate to the role they are to play. For example, as the proposals for the imperial baptism are announced, a 'jeune député avait fait un grand effort pour se donner la mine sérieuse d'un homme politique' (*Excellence* 17). One man is shaken from sleep and hastens to adopt a 'pose convenable' (23), whilst '[c]ertains députés exagéraient leur attention, les mains aux oreilles' (25). However, their enthusiasm flags as the speech wears on:

Mais le rapport commençait à paraître un peu long. Beaucoup de membres redevenaient graves; plusieurs même regardaient les tribunes du coin de l'œil, en gens pratiques qui éprouvaient quelque ennui à se montrer ainsi, dans le déshabillé de leur politique. (*Excellence* 27)

One explanation for the obedience of the Chamber to the government and to the Emperor is the phenomenon of the *candidature officielle*.¹⁴³ To ensure that the benches in the legislature are packed with the regime's supporters, the government selects an approved candidate in each electorate and supports his campaign, whilst wrecking that of any opponents.¹⁴⁴ The government, of course, demands pay-back in return for their support - obedience in the Chamber.¹⁴⁵ This practice is depicted in some detail in *Les Rougon-Macquart*. The historian Alain Plessis says that the system operated as a complement to other electoral strategies such as gerrymandering:

Gerrymandering provided one instrument : as population changes made it necessary to redraw constituency boundaries at each election, ministers of the

¹⁴² As others around him scuttle into the Chamber for the session, M. de Combelot lingers in the washroom, taking time to wash and dry his hands, smiling at their clean whiteness, before drawing forth a pocket comb and attending to his hair and beard (*Excellence* 355).

¹⁴³ 'L'administration intervient directement dans la campagne électorale sous le Second Empire en usant de la "candidature officielle" qui, sans être inscrite dans les textes constitutionnels, devient une institution inhérente au régime' (Naudin-Patriat, p.181)

¹⁴⁴ 'When, however, it came time for the elections of 1857, the government not only designated its candidates, but also brought tremendous pressure to bear on their behalf and frightened most of the opposition into silence' (R.B. Grant, *Excellence*, p.40). James McMillan terms the government's practice against the opposition candidates 'blatantly discriminatory' (McMillan, *Napoléon III*, p.49).

¹⁴⁵ 'Quand un homme avait été désigné candidat officiel, il devenait, une fois élu, l'otage du gouvernement, surtout s'il avait l'ambition d'être présenté à une prochaine législature' (Naudin-Patriat, p.182).

Interior took care to carve up hostile urban areas and drown hotbeds of opposition in safe *cantons*.¹⁴⁶

Another practice referred to in *Assommoir*, is a change in the domicile requirement for the right to vote, a law which reduced considerably the number of the urban working class population entitled to vote, as M. Madinier points out:

'Leur loi du 31 mai est une abomination. Maintenant, il faut deux ans de domicile. Trois millions de citoyens sont rayés des listes ...'¹⁴⁷

Curée is a good source of information about those who support and are supported by the Second Empire. In Maxime's prospective father-in-law, M. de Mareuil, we have a man who desperately desires political office. He is a 'candidat perpétuel à la députation' (*Curée* 340) who, in his 'ambition folle' (433), dreams of a 'haute situation politique' (433) and tries to enlist the support of the *préfet* M. Hupel de la Noue. He also attempts to secure the favours of Rougon through his association with Saccard. Rich and attractive, M. de Mareuil lacks intelligence and political aptitude, so appears to qualify on all grounds as an ideal servant of the Second Empire, where looking the part is the principal criterion.¹⁴⁸ Upon learning that a vacancy is to arise in the Nièvre, he undertakes all the necessary steps for nomination as the candidate.

[I]l mit de l'argent dans les nouveaux journaux, il acheta au fond de la Nièvre de grandes propriétés, il se prépara par tous les moyens connus une candidature au Corps législatif.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁶ Plessis, p.23. 'The novel features of the official candidacy were precisely that it was official, that it was used in an undisguised and cynical manner and also that an attempt was made to adapt rather unoriginal practices to the dimensions of universal suffrage' (*ibid.*). He records examples where the 'right' ballot paper was issued to the voter along with the voting card.

¹⁴⁷ *Assommoir* 455. In his notes to the Pléiade edition, Henri Mitterand comments on this provision: 'La loi électorale du 31 mai 1850 exigeait pour être électeur un domicile de trois ans (et non pas deux) dans le canton. Elle avait été votée, à l'instigation de Thiers, pour écarter du suffrage un nombre important d'ouvriers des villes' (*RM* II 1580).

¹⁴⁸ 'C'était le cerveau le plus incroyablement vide qu'on pût rencontrer. Il avait une carrure superbe, la face blanche et pensive d'un grand homme d'Etat; et, comme il écoutait d'une façon merveilleuse, avec des regards profonds, un calme majestueux du visage, on pouvait croire à un prodigieux travail intérieur de compréhension et de déduction. Sûrement, il ne pensait à rien. Mais il arrivait à troubler les gens, qui ne savaient plus s'ils avaient affaire à un homme supérieur ou à un imbécile' (*Curée* 433). Discussing the superficiality of politics under the Second Empire, Georges Bafaro remarks: 'l'apparence physique est un élément déterminant la réussite d'une carrière politique et l'on acquiert un poste intéressant d'autant que l'on possède une tournure flatteuse' ('Quelques aspects du pouvoir dans *Son Excellence Eugène Rougon*', *CN*, 72 (1998), 305-316, p.306).

¹⁴⁹ *Curée* 433. Note the importance attached to control of the organs of the press. As we shall see later in this chapter, the regime keeps a strong hand on the media. Françoise Naudin-Patriat comments :

Sadly for M. de Mareuil, having finally received a chance to stand for public office, he is lead astray by his enthusiasm, and his eventual election to the legislature is accompanied by unwelcome negative publicity. In collaboration with M. Hupel de la Noue, the *préfet*, the desperate candidate pulled out all the stops to ensure electoral success.¹⁵⁰

M. de Mareuil couvrit la circonscription de tables où les paysans burent et mangèrent pendant une semaine. Il promit, en outre, un chemin de fer, la construction d'un pont et de trois églises, et adressa, la veille du scrutin, aux électeurs influents, les portraits de l'empereur et de l'impératrice, deux grandes gravures recouvertes d'une vitre et encadrées d'une baguette d'or. Cet envoi eut un succès fou, la majorité fut écrasante.¹⁵¹

So blatant a rigging of the election attracts considerable press interest, and the *Corps législatif* is obliged to set aside the result to distance themselves from the scandalous conduct of the campaign in the Nièvre.¹⁵² The Minister of the Interior is furious at 'l'éclat de rire de la France entière' (*Curée* 513) which greets the accounts of M. de Mareuil's election, and the Minister 'parla même de mettre la candidature officielle sur un autre nom' (*ibid.*). Keen to secure M. de Mareuil's daughter (and dowry) for Maxime, Saccard persuades Rougon to give the unfortunate candidate another chance. In a less controversial campaign, the seat is secured.¹⁵³

The role of the *préfet* in the electoral process is important. Charged with ensuring that the official candidate is returned, an important function is to keep the campaigns of

'A moins de commettre maladresse sur maladresse, un riche propriétaire foncier a des chances de réussir à satisfaire ses ambitions politiques : devenir sénateur ou député' (Naudin-Patriat, p.126).

¹⁵⁰ Although the *préfet* is obliged to promote the campaign of the official candidate and keep that of any opposition candidate to a minimum, the suggestion is that in this case, he went too far. 'M. Hupel de la Noue, le préfet du département, avait déployé une telle vigueur, que les autres candidats ne purent même afficher leur profession de foi ni distribuer leurs bulletins' (*Curée* 513). Evidently these two matters are the fundamental *minima* which the *préfet* must accord opposition candidates.

¹⁵¹ *Curée* 513. Mareuil spent in excess of 300 000F in the area, buying property and financing his campaign.

¹⁵² 'Seulement, le Corps législatif venait de casser son élection, qui fut le scandale de la révision des pouvoirs. Cette élection était tout un poème héroï-comique, sur lequel les journaux vécurent pendant un mois' (*Curée* 513).

¹⁵³ At Saccard's 'bal travesti' we learn of M. Toutin-Laroche's seat in the *Sénat* and the confirmation of M. de Mareuil's seat in the lower house, as 'la Chambre avait bien voulu valider la deuxième élection' (*Curée* 539).

opposition candidates under control. Aspiring *préfet* Du Poizat describes the treatment dealt out to a republican candidate:

‘Vous n’avez pas idée de la façon dont on l’a traqué. Le préfet, les maires, les gendarmes, toute la clique est tombée sur lui; on lacérait ses affiches, on jetait ses bulletins dans les fossés, on arrêtait les quelques pauvres diables chargés de distribuer ses circulaires; jusqu’à sa tante, une digne femme pourtant, qui l’a fait prier de ne plus mettre les pieds chez elle, parce qu’il la compromettait. Et les journaux donc! il y était traité de brigand. Les bonnes femmes se signent maintenant, quand il passe dans un village.’¹⁵⁴

There is considerable pressure on the *préfet* (or *sous-préfet*, depending on the area) during the run-up to an election. They must satisfy the expectation that the official candidate will win the seat. They have at their disposal all the civil servants in the area.¹⁵⁵ In *Conquête*, however, things do not go to plan. The town swings politically against the Empire, and as Mouret explains to Faujas, the government failed to have its candidate elected at the last ballot. Given his republican sympathies, Mouret deems sending a strong message to the government in this way a good result.¹⁵⁶ The government’s representative, the *sous-préfet*, lost his chances of promotion over the failed campaign.¹⁵⁷ Following this unprecedented situation, the government recognises that Plassans is a special case demanding special treatment. The abbé Faujas is sent to work undercover and convert the town to Bonapartism. There is, therefore, no need to have an official candidate, as the *sous-préfet* announces:

‘J’ai été assez heureux pour faire entendre à Son Excellence que le gouvernement devait s’abstenir, dans l’intérêt immédiat de Plassans. Il n’y aura pas de candidat officiel.’¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁴ *Excellence* 136. This tallies closely with accounts given by historians. See Plessis, p.23.

¹⁵⁵ As Georges Pradalié describes: ‘Les préfets lancent dans la campagne électorale tous les fonctionnaires, en particulier les plus petits: gendarmes, gardes-champêtres, instituteurs’ (Pradalié, *Second Empire*, p.31).

¹⁵⁶ ‘“L’année dernière, nous avons nommé député le marquis de Lagrifoul, un vieux gentilhomme d’une intelligence médiocre, mais dont l’élection a joliment embêté la sous-préfecture”’ (*Conquête* 934).

¹⁵⁷ ‘“M. Péqueur des Saulaies,” continua Mouret, “a failli en tomber malade. Il croyait l’élection du candidat officiel assurée... [...] [J]e me demande ce qu’ils vont faire, à la sous-préfecture. Jamais plus leur candidat ne passera. Ils ne connaissent pas le pays, ils ne sont pas de force. On m’a assuré que M. Péqueur des Saulaies devait avoir une préfecture, si l’élection avait bien marché. Va-t’en voir s’ils viennent, Jean! Le voilà sous-préfet pour longtemps ...”’ (*Conquête* 934).

¹⁵⁸ *Conquête* 1146. The government appears in conciliatory mood. Mme de Condamin’s connections at Paris have secured a favour for M. Rastoil, who facilitated the election of the independent candidate in the previous election. She congratulates Rastoil: ‘“J’ai reçu une lettre de Paris, où l’on m’assure avoir vu le nom de votre fils sur une liste du garde des sceaux; il sera, je crois, nommé substitut à

M. Delangre, the unofficial (in that he is supported by Faujas) official candidate, wins the election, and 'la majorité fut écrasante' (*Conquête* 1151).

The character and personality of the official candidate is neither here nor there under this system, which perhaps explains the calibre of politicians seen in *Les Rougon-Macquart*. Voting for the official candidate is simply a matter of showing one's support for the regime, rather than selecting someone who can represent the constituency, as Lisa Quenu explains to her husband.¹⁵⁹ In *Pot-Bouille*, towards the end of the Second Empire, members of the Duveyrier salon discuss the upcoming elections, where one of the opposition candidates in their electorate is none other than M. Thiers. The liberals plan to vote for him and send a message to the Emperor : 'Tous s'entendaient encore sur la nécessité d'infliger une leçon à l'empereur' (*Pot-Bouille* 220).

Le candidat officiel était un grand chocolatier de la rue Saint-Honoré, M. Dewinck, qu'ils plaisantèrent beaucoup. Ce M. Dewinck n'avait pas même l'appui du clergé, que ses attaches avec les Tuileries inquiétaient.¹⁶⁰

For Duveyrier, however, the status of the candidate as the official choice of the government is the only relevant factor to consider.¹⁶¹ Having the official candidacy in a rural electorate is a guarantee of success, as the peasantry is faithful to the

Faverolles." Le président s'inclina, le sang au visage. Le ministère ne lui avait jamais pardonné l'élection du marquis de Lagrifoul' (1147).

¹⁵⁹ "Tu te souviens, aux élections, Gavard disait que le candidat de l'empereur était un homme qui avait fait faillite, qui se trouvait compromis dans de sales histoires. Ça pouvait être vrai, je ne dis pas non. Tu n'en as pas moins très sagement agi en votant pour lui, parce que la question n'était pas là, qu'on ne te demandait pas de prêter de l'argent, ni de faire des affaires avec ce monsieur, mais de montrer au gouvernement que tu étais satisfait de voir prospérer la charcuterie'" (*Ventre* 758). Quenu is the only one of the two with the right to vote, as under the Second Empire there was universal male suffrage only.

¹⁶⁰ *Pot-Bouille* 219. After the elections, they discuss 'le succès de la liste de l'opposition, passée tout entière, à Paris' (373). Although they wanted to send the Emperor a message, they are a little worried by the success of the opposition parties. 'Ils voyaient des ouvriers, noirs de poudre et de sang, entrer chez eux, violer leur bonne et boire leur vin. Sans doute, l'empereur méritait une leçon; seulement, ils commençaient à regretter de lui en avoir donné une aussi forte' (374). When Thiers stood against the government he won. Note the falling out between the Church and the regime, indicating the delicate situation over the Roman Question. In the early years of the Second Empire, the Church was a useful and reliable ally of the government.

¹⁶¹ 'Il le confessait hautement, il avait voté pour M. Dewinck, non pas que M. Dewinck représentât son opinion exacte, mais parce qu'il était le drapeau de l'ordre' (*Pot-Bouille* 374).

government.¹⁶² In M. de Chédeville, the inhabitants of Rognes are proud to have a representative whom they consider a close associate of the head of state.

Il était allé une fois à Compiègne, tout le pays l'appelait 'l'ami de l'empereur', et cela suffisait : on le nommait, comme s'il eût couché chaque soir aux Tuileries.¹⁶³

M. Rochefontaine, a local industrialist who supports the Empire and its policies, is unable to gain the all-important support of the *préfet* and the government, and stands against M. de Chédeville as an independent candidate. Without the title of official candidate he is wasting his time.

Il n'avait aucune chance, les électeurs des campagnes le traitaient en ennemi public, du moment où il n'était pas du côté du manche.¹⁶⁴

The result of the ballot is as expected, M. de Chédeville is returned.¹⁶⁵ By the time of the next election, however, the situation is reversed. M. de Chédeville has fallen from favour, whilst M. Rochefontaine's star is in the ascendancy.

De sorte que, par une aventure singulière, la situation s'était retournée, le grand propriétaire devenait le candidat indépendant, tandis que le grand usinier se trouvait être le candidat officiel.¹⁶⁶

So, there is no guarantee that the official candidacy will be awarded in perpetuity. As we saw, M. de Mareuil's energetic and blatant campaigning caused embarrassment to

¹⁶² M. de Chédeville nevertheless enlists the support of Hourdequin, whom he considers influential in the area: 'M. de Chédeville, député sortant, déjeunait à la Borderie, chez Hourdequin. Il faisait sa tournée électorale et il ménageait ce dernier, très puissant sur les paysans du canton, bien qu'il fût certain d'être réélu, grâce à son titre de candidat officiel' (*Terre* 487-488).

¹⁶³ *Terre* 488. The peasants believe that this proximity to the Emperor gives extra support to M. de Chédeville's election promises, such as a subsidy for a new road.

¹⁶⁴ *Terre* 489. There are Darwinian overtones here - the peasants support the man with the most powerful support network. Delhomme expresses what the peasantry sees as the objective of voting in an election: 'envoyer au gouvernement le député qu'il demande', so that 'le gouvernement soit solide pour faire aller les affaires' (*Terre* 681). His views reflect those of urban business people, for example the Quenus, as we saw earlier.

¹⁶⁵ Alain Plessis identifies the peasantry's support for the regime. 'Consequently, the peasant world, which displayed scant interest in politics, tended to support any government that guaranteed respect for property, and it became a factor of stability' (Plessis, p.110). We saw in the first chapter of the thesis how the peasants rallied to the Darwinian strong man.

¹⁶⁶ *Terre* 674. M. Rochefontaine came to the emperor's attention on the basis on a treatise on free-market economics. In this changing allegiance of the regime is symbolised the evolving social order under the Second Empire - the prominence of industrial and business interests as opposed to the traditional dominance of the landowning class.

the government, and he almost lost his seat through his foolishness. For M. Kahn, it was a speech in the Chamber criticising a government white paper which cost him the official candidacy.¹⁶⁷ M. de Chédeville too loses the government's support - his behaviour evidently surpassed the limits the regime was willing to tolerate.

Pendant la dernière législature, M. de Chédeville avait déplu, les uns disaient en affichant des amitiés orléanistes, les autres, en scandalisant les Tuileries par une histoire gaillarde, la jeune femme d'un huissier de la Chambre, folle de lui, malgré son âge. Quoi qu'il en fût, la protection du préfet s'était retirée du député sortant, pour se porter sur M. Rochefontaine, l'ancien candidat de l'opposition. (*Terre* 673-674).

The text generously offers two suggestions to explain M. de Chédeville's fall from favour : political reasons or sexual impropriety. M. de Chédeville is not the only politician to have an eye for the ladies, in fact, as we shall see later in this chapter, sexual misconduct is endemic among the representatives of the legal system. Perhaps the first alternative is thus the more likely explanation for the end of his political career. James McMillan points out that the practice of *candidature officielle* was considerably reduced in the elections towards the end of the Second Empire.¹⁶⁸ Doubtless its authoritarian taint sat uncomfortably with the liberal measures being introduced.

The phenomenon of the *candidature officielle* illustrates the environment of political patronage under the Second Empire. It also demonstrates how positions of power (however fettered that power might be in the case of the legislature) are awarded to people on the basis of almost anything other than their qualification to perform the job in question. We shall see how this is also the case of other representatives of the legal system.

¹⁶⁷ In attempting to protect his business interests, M. Kahn went too far. 'Il avait eu l'imprudence, pendant la dernière session, de critiquer assez vivement un projet de loi déposé par le gouvernement; ce projet de loi, qui créait dans un département voisin une concurrence redoutable, menaçait de ruiner ses hauts fourneaux de Bressuire. Pourtant, il ne croyait pas avoir dépassé les bornes d'une légitime défense, lorsque, à son retour dans les Deux-Sèvres, où il allait soigner son élection, il avait appris, de la bouche même du préfet, qu'il n'était plus candidat officiel; il cessait de plaire, le ministre venait de désigner un avoué de Niort, homme d'une grande médiocrité. C'était un coup de massue' (*Excellence* 134-135).

¹⁶⁸ Discussing the elections of May-June 1869, McMillan states: 'The government tried to maintain the system of official candidatures, but many prefects and mayors were reluctant to cooperate. In the towns, the system broke down under the sheer weight of opposition. In Paris, the electoral campaign

By the end of *Excellence*, however, the atmosphere in the Chamber is different. The political situation has changed, just as we saw in the substitution of the businessman for the old-style landholder as official candidate in Rognes which symbolised the changing social and economic situation. ‘Ce n’était plus le Corps législatif ensommeillé qui avait voté, cinq ans plus tôt, un crédit de quatre cent mille francs pour le baptême du prince impérial’ (*Excellence* 358). For a start, there is a small number of members of the opposition, and the public are also more numerous in the areas reserved for them. The press gallery has been restored. In his speech as the recently reinstated Minister (without portfolio), Rougon states his support for a more active parliament : “‘Un parlement qui discute est un parlement qui travaille’” he announces, in stark contrast to his earlier authoritarian views by which parliament was completely subjugated.¹⁶⁹

Françoise Naudin-Patriat describes in some detail the widespread corruption in political circles during the Second Empire as seen in *Les Rougon-Macquart*. She also underlines the close connection between big business and government, which we saw earlier in the relationship between Rougon and Saccard.

Les hommes au pouvoir ne répugnent pas à user de leur influence pour retirer des avantages personnels ou pour en faire obtenir à leurs protégés, parents et familiers. Le milieu politique n'est pas à l'abri des pressions exercées par le monde des affaires qu'il protège et soutient quand la situation l'exige. Les politiciens complices de certains groupes d'intérêts utilisent sans vergogne la politique à des fins économiques privées.¹⁷⁰

There is a clear example of this in *Curée*. In a more blatant example of jobs for the boys than that represented by the *candidature officielle*, one of Saccard's business associates, M. Toutin-Laroche, implicated in the vast fraud which was the *Société générale des ports du Maroc*, finds himself all of a sudden in the Senate. He is a

was accompanied by an upsurge in violence and threats to public order’ (McMillan, *Napoléon III*, p.126).

¹⁶⁹ *Excellence* 366. This is the complete opposite of the position he defended in the Cabinet meeting during his previous Ministry : “‘Un parlement qui se tait est un parlement qui travaille...” (289).

¹⁷⁰ Naudin-Patriat, p.17. This is true all the way to the top. ‘Personne ne reste intègre, pas même les plus hautes autorités : les ministres, tantôt, pensent retirer quelque profit personnel de l'exercice de leurs fonctions, tantôt, se complaisent à satisfaire les requêtes de leur entourage, tantôt, protègent les activités des personnes liées au régime’ (*ibid.*).

member of the *conseil municipal* in Paris, so not a stranger to politics, but his unexpected promotion is, in fact, a government cover-up. The collapse of the investment company lead to an official inquiry which exposed that the proposed development in Morocco started and stopped on the drawing board in Paris. It goes without saying that all the money invested was lost, though Toutin-Laroche denies accusations of misappropriation of funds.

Et il fit tant de bruit, que le gouvernement, pour calmer et réhabiliter devant l'opinion cet homme utile, se décida à l'envoyer au Sénat. Ce fut ainsi qu'il pêcha le siège tant ambitionné dans une affaire qui avait failli le conduire en police correctionnelle.¹⁷¹

This example serves, along with the others, to give us a flavour of the politicians who appear in *Les Rougon-Macquart*. Self-interest, corruption, lust for power and ethical flexibility characterise these individuals, by whose hands the law is drafted. We saw how true this is of Rougon, Delcambre and Camy-Lamotte, all politicians with particular responsibility for the legal system. The next section addresses that class of character concerned with the application and interpretation of those laws.

¹⁷¹ *Curée* 540-541. As is seen in the case of Aristide Saccard, the regime encouraged entrepreneurial spirit, which was responsible for much of the economic boom of the Second Empire. The regime's support is not dependent on the legality of the business practices, rather on the suppression of any unfavourable publicity which might reflect badly on the government. The line between political office and imprisonment is evidently a fine one, as we see in M. Toutin-Laroche's case. Some crooks get caught out, but those with good connections appear to prosper.

Judges and magistrates

Our second group of representatives of the legal system are members of the judiciary. The three key portraits are those of M. Denizet (*Bête*), M. Duveyrier (*Pot-Bouille*) and Rougon's brother-in-law, M. Beulin-d'Orchère (*Excellence*). They exhibit characteristics which mark the group as a class. Denizet has the ambition and the arrogance, Duveyrier the hypocrisy and Beulin-d'Orchère the political opportunism. They are perhaps extreme examples, but they differ from other representatives of the legal system by a matter of degree rather than mood.

We have already encountered M. Denizet, the *juge d'instruction* charged with the investigation into the murders of Grandmorin and Séverine. His is the most detailed portrait of a magistrate in the cycle of novels. Denizet is ambitious, and sees this case as a likely route to promotion and a prestigious post in Paris.¹⁷² He is almost a comic character in the novel, priding himself on his intelligence and grasp on criminal psychology.¹⁷³

La finesse le perdait le plus souvent, il était trop perspicace, il rusait trop avec la vérité simple et bonne, d'après un idéal de métier, s'étant fait de sa fonction un type d'anatomiste moral, doué de seconde vue, extrêmement spirituel. D'ailleurs, il n'était pas non plus un sot.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷² 'Son intérêt seul corrigeait sa passion, il avait un si cuisant désir d'être décoré et de passer à Paris, qu'après s'être laissé emporter, au premier jour de l'instruction, par son amour de la vérité, il avançait maintenant avec une extrême prudence, en devinant de toutes parts des fondrières, dans lesquelles son avenir pouvait sombrer' (*Bête* 1077). For Françoise Naudin-Patriat, this combination of ambition and a desire to identify the truth places Denizet in a delicate position: 'Ce désir le place à la merci du Pouvoir, et en l'occurrence, du Ministère de la Justice; il progresse donc prudemment dans cette affaire où, s'il n'y prenait garde, la passion de la vérité pourrait compromettre son avenir. Le ministère de la Justice n'hésite pas à faire pression directement ou indirectement sur le juge; M. Denizet ne s'en offusque pas' (Naudin-Patriat, p.218). Ambition wins out.

¹⁷³ 'Il se passionnait, lui aussi, d'autant plus qu'il avait de l'ambition et qu'il attendait ardemment une affaire de cette importance, pour mettre en lumière les hautes qualités de perspicacité et d'énergie qu'il s'accordait' (*Bête* 1077). 'Le juge eut un geste de triomphe, croyant devoir ce commencement de franchise à son habileté. Il disait connaître par expérience l'étrange peine que certains témoins ont à confesser ce qu'ils savent; et, ceux-là, il se flattait de les accoucher malgré eux' (1096).

¹⁷⁴ *Bête* 1084. Camy-Lamotte's appraisal of Denizet reflects this: '[I]l s'étonnait qu'elle [la magistrature] fût encore si digne dans sa pauvreté, si intelligente dans son engourdissement professionnel' (1115). He understands perfectly what Camy-Lamotte wants: 'Ce Denizet n'était pas si bête, quand il n'obéissait plus à la routine du métier, trônant dans l'absolu de sa perspicacité et de sa toute-puissance. Il avait compris pourquoi on le mandait, non au ministère de la Justice, mais au domicile particulier du secrétaire général' (1116).

He has the intelligence to see the problems which might arise if Grandmorin's reputation as an abuser of young girls were to become public.¹⁷⁵ But equally, he is unable to accept the truth when it is stated simply. He does not know what to make of Cabuche's willing admission of death threats against the deceased and his regret at not having avenged the attack on Louissette. Denizet wonders what sort of complicated agenda Cabuche can be serving with what can surely only be a false naivety.¹⁷⁶ It is on the basis of misunderstandings such as these that Elliott M. Grant qualifies the novel as a satire of the judicial system and of the Second Empire as a whole.¹⁷⁷

Denizet constructs a case for the prosecution so complicated and intricate that the truth does not stand a chance against it, in spite of the judge's 'amour de la vérité'.¹⁷⁸ A 'dossier énorme' (*Bête* 1082) is produced, as the judge undertakes a thorough investigation. There are 310 pieces of evidence and witness statements 'd'une confusion telle, que chaque témoignage y était démenti par un autre' (1083). Denizet's *idée fixe* about the murder is effectively a closed mind to any other explanation, however truthful. He does not believe Roubaud's accurate account of the first murder as it does not tally with his own convoluted conclusions.¹⁷⁹

When the matter comes to trial, it is a moment of personal glory for the judge:

¹⁷⁵ 'Pour lui, l'affaire devenait claire, il y avait eu certainement violence de la part de Grandmorin, dont la réputation était connue. Cela rendait l'instruction délicate, il se promettait de redoubler de prudence, jusqu'à ce que les avis qu'il attendait du ministère fussent arrivés' (*Bête* 1093). When questioned by Camy-Lamotte on Louissette: "'Dame! je crois que le président l'avait mise en un vilain état, et cela ressortira sûrement du procès... Ajoutez que, si la défense est confiée à un avocat de l'opposition, on peut s'attendre à un déballage d'histoires fâcheuses, car ce ne sont pas ces histoires qui manquent, là-bas, dans notre pays'" (1116).

¹⁷⁶ 'Comment! le prévenu avouait les menaces. Quelle ruse cela cachait-il?' (*Bête* 1100). 'Et, dans son idée fixe du crime, c'était le juge qui perdait pied, par trop de finesse professionnelle, compliquant, allant au-delà de la vérité simple' (1102). Likewise, he dismisses Roubaud's honest account of events as 'ruses savantes' (1312).

¹⁷⁷ 'The following investigation leads to a satire of the judicial system and thereby to satire of the Second Empire, for the government, obtaining reliable information concerning the real culprit, nevertheless fails to prosecute him lest the character of Grandmorin, an important figure of Imperial Society, be exposed and the revelations be embarrassing to the régime' (E.M. Grant, *Emile Zola*, pp. 148-149).

¹⁷⁸ *Bête* 1077. As Philippe Hamon remarks: 'Le malheur, c'est que les histoires et contes à dormir debout sont la vérité, et que la vérité est reçue comme un mensonge et n'emporte pas l'adhésion' (*Miscellanées Mitterand*, p. 143).

¹⁷⁹ Auguste Dezalay refers to: 'l'esprit tortueux du juge Denizet qui préfère les raffinements de son invention romanesque à la brutale simplicité des aveux de Roubaud' (Dezalay, *Opéra*, p. 194). Denizet is thrown both by Roubaud's simple statements of fact and by Cabuche's rough assertions. Evidently both defendants are unable to express themselves in the manner expected by the legal system, which suggests an institutional class bias.

Il y avait là un triomphe pour le juge d'instruction Denizet, car on ne tarissait pas d'éloges, dans le monde judiciaire, sur la façon dont il venait de mener à bien cette affaire compliquée et obscure : un chef-d'œuvre de fine analyse, disait-on, une reconstitution logique de la vérité, une création véritable, en un mot. (*Bête* 1307)

Denizet is a willingly corruptible pawn in a larger game, namely the political manipulation of the case, orchestrated, as we have seen, by M. Camy-Lamotte, whose promises of promotion and decoration do the trick for Denizet.¹⁸⁰ Denizet laments the relatively low status and pay of his job.¹⁸¹ Unlike other judges in the novels, he depends exclusively on his salary.¹⁸² His desperation for a better position makes him open to corruption, and he allows M. Camy-Lamotte to guide him away from an arrest in the first case.¹⁸³

Et lui qui ne se serait pas vendu, nourri dans la tradition de cette magistrature honnête et médiocre, il céda tout de suite à une simple espérance, à l'engagement vague que l'administration prenait de le favoriser. La fonction judiciaire n'était plus qu'un métier comme un autre, et il traînait le boulet de l'avancement, en solliciteur affamé, toujours prêt à plier sous les ordres du pouvoir.¹⁸⁴

Denizet's ambition is matched by Alphonse Duveyrier's hypocrisy. He is among the main characters in *Pot-Bouille*, which is one of Zola's most explicit attacks on the

¹⁸⁰ Camy-Lamotte instructs Denizet : "Enfin, on désire un non-lieu ... Arrangez les choses pour que l'affaire soit classée." After the stick comes the carrot: "Voici longtemps que nous suivons vos efforts, et je puis me permettre de vous dire que nous vous appellerions dès maintenant à Paris, s'il y avait une vacance." M. Denizet eut un mouvement. Quoi donc? s'il rendait le service demandé, on n'allait pas combler sa grande ambition, son rêve d'un siège à Paris.' Camy-Lamotte then applies icing to Denizet's cake, confirming the longed-for decoration "Je suis heureux de vous annoncer que vous êtes porté pour la croix, au 15 août prochain" (*Bête* 1117).

¹⁸¹ This is historically accurate, according to Georges Pradalié: 'Les traitements sont en général assez peu considérables, notamment pour les magistrats, ce qui exige la fortune pour rechercher ces fonctions' (Pradalié, *Le Second Empire*, p. 34).

¹⁸² 'Sans fortune, ravagé de besoins que ne pouvaient contenter ses maigres appointements, il vivait dans cette dépendance de la magistrature mal payée, acceptée seulement des médiocres, et où les intelligents se dévorent, en attendant de se vendre' (*Bête* 1077). His response to M. de Lachesnaye's dissatisfaction with Grandmorin's will, under which he receives a mere two million francs is one of 'dédain jaloux' (1085).

¹⁸³ 'Il était emporté par le besoin de trouver la vraie piste, par la gloire d'être le premier à l'avoir flairée, quitte à l'abandonner, si on lui en donnait l'ordre' (*Bête* 1078). Professional satisfaction is easily sacrificed to social and financial advancement. He is overly polite to Mme de Lachesnaye, 'car il y avait encore en lui un magistrat mondain, fréquentant la société de Rouen et des environs' (1084). With the arrival of Mme Bonnehon (Grandmorin's sister), Denizet's austere little office becomes a 'salon mondain' (1089).

¹⁸⁴ *Bête* 1118. As we shall see, Denizet is rare among the representatives of the legal system in that he ever subscribed to the notion of an impartial judiciary, and even more rare in his resistance hitherto to exploit his position for his own ends.

bourgeoisie, with savage satire and heavy irony setting the tone for the text, and Duveyrier is severely slated.¹⁸⁵ As with the majority of other magistrates in *Les Rougon-Macquart*, he owes his position to family connections rather than any talent of his own.¹⁸⁶ The spirit of patronage which infused the political world in *Excellence* is also alive and kicking in this branch of the legal system. Like Eugène Rougon, Duveyrier considers himself a product of the Second Empire, and therefore defends it staunchly, suggesting a close link between the regime and its legal system.¹⁸⁷ Counsel at the Court of Appeal, Duveyrier is a hard-line judge, whose firmness on the bench is rewarded with promotion to higher office.

En effet, ces messieurs passaient de la politique à la morale. Ils écoutaient Duveyrier donner des détails sur une affaire dans laquelle on avait beaucoup remarqué son attitude. On allait même le nommer président de chambre et officier de la Légion d'honneur. Il s'agissait d'un infanticide remontant déjà à plus d'un an. La mère dénaturée, une véritable sauvagesse, comme il le disait, [...] avait raconté aux jurés tout un roman ridicule, l'abandon d'un séducteur, la misère, la faim, une crise folle de désespoir devant le petit qu'elle ne pouvait nourrir : en un mot, ce qu'elles disaient toutes. Mais il fallait un exemple. Duveyrier se félicitait d'avoir résumé les débats avec cette clarté saisissante, qui parfois déterminait le verdict du jury. 'Et vous l'avez condamnée?' demanda le docteur. 'A cinq ans,' répondit le conseiller. [...] 'Il est temps d'opposer une digue à la débauche qui menace de submerger Paris.' (*Pot-Bouille* 379)

Duveyrier pronounces this speech as in the attic accommodation provided for the servants, Adèle, the Josserrands' maid, gives birth alone to a baby which she subsequently kills. Although there is some doubt, the magistrate is one of the possible

¹⁸⁵ 'Au marquis de Chouard, l'homme du conseil d'administration, va répondre l'honorable M. Duveyrier, conseiller à la Cour d'appel, tous deux dévorés par le vice, mais, le second, plus hypocritement que le premier' (Guillemin, *Présentation*, p.188). To be compared unfavourably to the degenerate old rake of *Nana* is criticism indeed.

¹⁸⁶ As the irreverent Trublot tells Octave Mouret : "Un homme, mon cher, qui avait toujours eu de la chance. Pas plus fort qu'un autre, mais poussé par tout le monde. D'une vieille famille bourgeoise, un père ancien président. Attaché au parquet dès sa sortie de l'Ecole, puis juge suppléant à Reims, de là juge à Paris, au tribunal de première instance, décoré, et enfin conseiller à la cour, avant quarante-cinq ans ... Hein! c'est raide!" (*Pot-Bouille* 82). He is also helped by colleagues in the legal system : 'Et ils rejoignirent tous deux le groupe, où l'on complimentait Duveyrier sur la rédaction d'un arrêt, dont il s'avouait l'auteur; le président, qui était son ami, lui réservait certaines besognes aisées et brillantes, pour le mettre en vue'(94). His wife refers to this assistance from his peers, explaining that 'ses collègues l'avaient chargé d'un rapport' (182).

¹⁸⁷ 'Lui, était de famille orléaniste; mais il devait tout à l'Empire et jugeait convenable de le défendre' (*Pot-Bouille* 87). He votes for the government candidate in the elections: 'parce qu'il était le drapeau de l'ordre'(374). He sometimes takes an even harder line than the regime itself. 'Duveyrier, au milieu d'un groupe, blâmait vivement l'empereur d'avoir autorisé, à la Comédie-Française, une pièce qui attaquait la société' (*Pot-Bouille* 157).

fathers of the child.¹⁸⁸ He defends religion and family values, in much the same manner as other key bourgeois figures in the novels. Françoise Naudin-Patriat suggests that this is more or less demanded by his job description.¹⁸⁹ She identifies it as a function of the male bourgeois character in the novels:

Les hommes, on l'a vu, ne sont pas avarés de sermons dans lesquels ils défendent la nécessité de principes moraux stricts. Leurs fonctions et le rôle dévolu à leur sexe les poussent à disserter de tout ce qui concerne la société. Les magistrats, en particulier, ne se privent pas de discourir sur le problème de la morale. (Naudin-Patriat, p.260)

There is a vast difference, however, between what the magistrate preaches and what he practises, a glimpse of which Mouret catches:

'Moralisons le mariage, messieurs, moralisons le mariage,' répétait Duveyrier de son air rigide, avec son visage enflammé, où Octave voyait maintenant le sang âcre des vices secrets. (*Pot-Bouille* 96)

Duveyrier finds respite from his loveless marriage with a series of mistresses whom he supports financially in out-of-the way love nests.¹⁹⁰ Funding these numerous households, and keeping the particularly demanding Clarisse in the style to which she believes she is entitled, has a dramatic effect on his finances, and creates unwelcome publicity amongst more junior members of the bar, which Duveyrier finds distracting as he attempts to 'rendre la justice'.¹⁹¹ Françoise Naudin-Patriat sees a close parallel between Duveyrier and Muffat from *Nana*.¹⁹² In a subtle reference to his hypocrisy,

¹⁸⁸ Chantal Jennings suggests that Zola's depiction of the hypocrisy of Duveyrier and the others has comic effect: '[E]n couvrant de ridicule l'hypocrisie bouffonne des bourgeois bien pensants qui, tout en vivant dans le vice, s'indignent, de l'immoralité de domestiques qu'ils ont eux-mêmes dépravés' ('Zola féministe? [I]', *CN*, 44 (1972), 172-187, p.176).

¹⁸⁹ 'Les magistrats se sentent sûrement investis d'une mission moralisatrice; on les entend fréquemment s'élever avec vigueur contre des mœurs ou une institution jugées immorales' (Naudin-Patriat, p.241).

¹⁹⁰ Trublot and Gueulin discuss Duveyrier's sexual arrangements in front of Octave Mouret: 'Était-ce malheureux, un homme riche, un magistrat, se laisser dindonner de cette façon par les femmes! Toujours il lui en avait fallu, dans les quartiers excentriques, au bout des lignes d'omnibus: petites dames en chambre, modestes et jouant un rôle de veuve; lingères ou mercières vagues, tenant des magasins sans clientèle; filles tirées de la boue, nippées, cloîtrées, chez lesquelles il allait une fois par semaine, régulièrement, ainsi qu'un employé se rend à son bureau' (*Pot-Bouille* 130-131).

¹⁹¹ 'Sa situation s'aggravait d'autre part: il était à bout d'argent, il tremblait d'être compromis sur son siège de magistrat; certes, on ne pouvait le destituer; seulement, les jeunes avocats le regardaient d'un air polisson, ce qui le gênait pour rendre la justice' (*Pot-Bouille* 350).

¹⁹² 'Surtout, Duveyrier tolère, comme le comte Muffat, des humiliations qui l'avilissent [...] Tous deux, esclaves de leurs désirs pour la femme, tombent, par leur soumission et leur docilité, dans la plus profonde déchéance, jusqu'à perdre toute dignité' (Naudin-Patriat, p.262). She identifies their bourgeois upbringing and education as the cause of their pitiful situation at the hands of Nana and

we learn that Duveyrier removes the red ribbon of the *Légion d'honneur* from his buttonhole before each rendez-vous with his mistress.¹⁹³

Not only does he have a double standard about sex, but Duveyrier is also guilty of sharp practice. His father-in-law dies intestate, and with his lawyer, Renaudin, Duveyrier concocts a scam by which his two brothers-in-law, Théophile and Auguste Vabre, are deprived of a considerable inheritance. The deceased's main asset is the apartment building in which all the novel's protagonists live. Appealing to the heirs' greed, Duveyrier persuades them to authorise an auction of the property, starting at a low price which he assures them will lead to a bidding war. What eventuates is a rigged auction, conducted by Duveyrier's tame lawyer, and the property is sold to Duveyrier at a knock-down price. The proceeds are not even sufficient for the heirs to pay off the mortgages on the property.¹⁹⁴

Our third magistrate is Rougon's brother-in-law, M. Beulin-d'Orchère, whose political opportunism and ambition (in the absence of particular talent) illustrate two characteristics of the majority of the representatives of the legal system.¹⁹⁵ He is among the characters who sat on one of the notorious *commissions mixtes* which followed the coup d'état.¹⁹⁶ As befits a supporter of the regime, he takes a strong moral line and supports family values.¹⁹⁷

Clarisse (p.263). Into this category she adds the landowner Hourdequin from *Terre* (p.283). In her view, we would feel sympathy for them if they were not so negative about the lower classes (p.284).

¹⁹³ 'Pourtant, il n'avait pas son ruban rouge, qu'il retirait quand il venait chez sa maîtresse; un dernier scrupule, une distinction délicate, où sa pudeur s'entêtait. Clarisse, sans vouloir le dire, en était très blessée' (*Pot-Bouille* 133). This practice is also seen in *Nana* where the well-placed men who frequent prostitutes from the rougher end of the market, make their way to the grimy hotel rooms 'en mettant leur décoration dans la poche' (*Nana* 1313).

¹⁹⁴ 'Ensuite, il leur souffla l'idée, sur le conseil même du notaire, disait-il, de mettre la maison à bas prix, à cent quarante mille francs seulement : c'était très malin, les amateurs afflueraient, les enchères s'allumeraient et dépasseraient toutes les prévisions. Théophile et Auguste riaient de confiance. Puis, le jour de la vente, après cinq ou six enchères, maître Renaudin adjugea brusquement la maison à Duveyrier, pour la somme de cent quarante-neuf mille francs. Il n'y avait pas même de quoi payer les hypothèques' (*Pot-Bouille* 222). We saw earlier how, as a result of this incident, Duveyrier is threatened with legal action by one of his brothers-in-law.

¹⁹⁵ Having looked at contemporary sources to identify the historical model for the character, Richard B. Grant says of Beulin-d'Orchère : 'That Zola actually composed a composite minor character is hard to prove, although it seems probable, in any event, he succeeded in creating a representative magistrate of the era, competent, austere, but quick to use any means in order to advance himself professionally' (R.B.Grant, *Excellence*, p.63).

¹⁹⁶ Rougon relates his future brother-in-law's CV to Clorinde: "'M. Beulin-d'Orchère, cinquante ans, d'une famille de robe, a été substitut à Montbrison, procureur du roi à Orléans, avocat général à Rouen, a fait partie d'une commission mixte en 52, est venu ensuite à Paris comme conseiller à la Cour d'appel,

He met Rougon shortly before the coup d'état and 'il lui témoignait depuis cette époque une estime particulière' (*Excellence* 103) and therefore is a keen supporter of Rougon's return to power,¹⁹⁸ and shows his commitment to the extent of facilitating Rougon's marriage to his sister, Véronique.¹⁹⁹ As with other members of Rougon's 'bande' he has a clear idea of what he expects in return for his help:

M. Beulin-d'Orchère avait l'intrigue lourde; il évoqua contre M. de Marsy une affaire scandaleuse, qu'on se hâta d'étouffer. Il se montrait plus adroit, en laissant dire qu'il pourrait bien être garde des Sceaux un jour, si son beau-frère remontait au pouvoir; ce qui mettait à sa dévotion les magistrats ses collègues. (*Excellence* 188)

Rougon attempts to secure the ministry for his brother-in-law but meets with resistance from the Emperor. Beulin-d'Orchère does not appear to consider a lesser promotion adequate compensation.²⁰⁰ Clorinde sees Rougon snubbed by his brother-in-law and remarks on it. Rougon allows his irritation with Beulin-d'Orchère's demands to become apparent:

'Que voulez-vous! je ne puis pourtant pas leur donner la lune! ... Ainsi, voilà Beulin-d'Orchère qui a fait le rêve d'être garde des Sceaux. J'ai tenté l'impossible, j'ai sondé l'empereur sans pouvoir rien en tirer. L'empereur, je crois, a peur de lui. Ce n'est pas ma faute, n'est-ce pas? Beulin-d'Orchère est premier président. Cela devrait lui suffire, que diable! en attendant mieux. Et il évite de me saluer! C'est un sot.' (*Excellence* 276)

Beulin-d'Orchère feels let down and, like the rest of the 'bande', jumps ship to the Clorinde-Delestang clique, complaining bitterly about Rougon's apparent

enfin est aujourd'hui président de cette cour ... Ah! j'oubliais! il a approuvé le décret du 22 janvier 1852, confisquant les biens de la famille d'Orléans..." (*Excellence* 106).

¹⁹⁷ For example, during the weekend at Compiègne, the Emperor refers to Beulin-d'Orchère's treatise on divorce (*Excellence* 164). The magistrate also discusses his views on divorce following the official dinner, a monologue judged 'crevant' (166) by a fellow guest, who happens to be a novelist.

¹⁹⁸ 'On pousserait le grand homme au pouvoir malgré lui, on le compromettrait, s'il le fallait. M. Beulin-d'Orchère et toute la magistrature l'appuyaient sourdement' (*Excellence* 153). At Compiègne he compliments Rougon extravagantly in front of the Emperor (168).

¹⁹⁹ It is clear, however, that he views this as an investment in his own career. He complains to Clorinde that he cannot persuade his sister to provide inside information about Rougon, and describes the marriage as one 'dont il ne tirait aucun profit' (*Excellence* 319).

²⁰⁰ '[L]e magistrat, nommé récemment premier président de la Cour à Paris, ambitionnait les Sceaux; mais l'empereur, tâté à son égard, était resté impénétrable' (*Excellence* 224).

ingratitude.²⁰¹ When they secure him the position of Minister of Justice, he rushes round to tell his sister, in the hope of causing some trouble in the marriage.²⁰²

This character is an excellent example not only of the calculating and self-serving representative of the legal profession with which *Les Rougon-Macquart* are littered, but also as an illustration of the prevalent expectation in the novels that people in positions of power are beholden to provide favours and services for those who support them. This *piston* or patronage is one of the recurring motifs in the cycle.

Legal practitioners

The sheer number of representatives of the legal system in the novels can be explained by the fact that a legal training was a common choice of vocational education among the bourgeoisie. Several of the main characters in the novels have undertaken legal studies at some point in their career, even if they do not practise law. Félicité Rougon was particularly keen for her sons to enter the professions.²⁰³ Of the Rougons' sons, Pascal went to Medical School, and his brothers Eugène and Aristide both studied law.²⁰⁴ The importance placed on education is a privilege of the bourgeoisie, or those

²⁰¹ 'Il se plaignait amèrement de son beau-frère, l'accusait de travailler à la fortune d'une foule d'étrangers; mais cela se passait toujours ainsi, on se moquait bien des parents! Rougon seul pouvait détourner l'empereur de lui confier les Sceaux, par crainte d'avoir à partager son influence dans le conseil' (*Excellence* 318). We have already seen the help Rougon gave to Saccard, and he also arranged a profitable position and a decoration for his father, as revealed by two members of the Plassans community discussing the career of the town's celebrated son. "'Leur fils Eugène, celui qui a fait à Paris une fortune politique si étonnante, député, ministre, conseiller familial des Tuileries, obtint facilement une recette particulière et la croix pour son père'" (*Conquête* 952).

²⁰² 'M. Beulin-d'Orchère; le magistrat, instruit déjà de la chute de Rougon, avait voulu accabler sa sœur, lui annoncer sa prochaine entrée au ministère de la justice, tâcher de jeter enfin la discorde dans le ménage' (*Excellence* 351).

²⁰³ This emphasis on education represents a considerable financial investment for the family.

'L'instruction des trois gamins greva terriblement le budget de la maison Rougon' (*Fortune* 60).

²⁰⁴ 'Deux firent leur droit, le troisième suivit les cours de l'Ecole de médecine' (*Fortune* 61). Eugène completed his studies and worked as a provincial lawyer before entering politics. Saccard did not complete his legal training, having idled away his time and not taking a single law exam. 'A Paris, il menait une vie sale et oisive; il fut un de ces étudiants qui prennent leurs inscriptions dans les brasseries du Quartier latin. D'ailleurs, il n'y resta que deux années; son père, effrayé, voyant qu'il n'avait pas encore passé un seul examen, le retint à Plassans (64).

who aspire to that social order.²⁰⁵ The families of Florent (*Ventre*) and Maurice (*Débâcle*) made considerable sacrifices to fund their sons' legal education.²⁰⁶

In families where the fathers are involved in the law, the sons follow in the paternal footsteps and, as a matter of course, are usually helped along by their father's connections in the job. Françoise Naudin-Patriat points out that this is generally true across the professions.²⁰⁷

We saw this in the case of Duveyrier, it is true of M. de Lachesnaye,²⁰⁸ and several of the young men in *Conquête*.²⁰⁹ There are also men such as Octave Mouret's friend Paul Vallagnosc who 'avait fait son droit par tradition de famille' (*Bonheur* 448), and Sandoz's classmate Pouillaud, who 'finit son droit, il reprendra ensuite l'étude d'avoué de son père' (*Œuvre* 38). It is rare that a son does not follow his father into the law, but this is the case of the magistrate's son, Massias, who works in the financial markets, 'n'ayant pas voulu continuer ses études de droit' (*Argent* 31).

The vast majority of the several dozen representatives of the legal system in *Les Rougon-Macquart* do not hold the high profile positions discussed in the sections

²⁰⁵ This is seen clearly in the attitude of Mme Chanteau who is delighted at Lazare's decision to switch from music to medicine: 'Elle aurait préféré son fils dans l'administration ou dans la magistrature; mais les médecins étaient au moins des gens honorables, et qui gagnaient beaucoup d'argent' (*Joie* 843). Nana's young lover, Georges Hugon, is a law student (*Nana* 1152). François Mouret is keen that his more intelligent son, Serge, study for the bar in Paris. 'Il ne voulait pas entendre parler d'une Faculté de province; Paris, selon lui, était nécessaire à un garçon qui voulait aller loin. Il mettait dans son fils une grande ambition, disant que de plus bêtes - ses cousins Rougon, par exemple - avaient fait un joli chemin' (*Conquête* 1037).

²⁰⁶ Florent's mother, a widow, 's'était tuée au travail pour que son fils pût faire son droit' (*Ventre* 640). Maurice ended up in the army 'à la suite de grandes fautes, toute une dissipation de tempérament faible et exalté, de l'argent qu'il avait jeté au jeu, aux femmes, aux sottises de Paris dévorateur, lorsqu'il y était venu terminer son droit et que la famille s'était saignée, pour faire de lui un monsieur' (*Débâcle* 405). This early interest in women and gambling might have stood Maurice in good stead as a representative of the legal system as we see them in the novels!

²⁰⁷ 'Dans la bourgeoisie on se succède souvent de père en fils dans les belles carrières : on est magistrat, médecin, avocat, haut fonctionnaire, chargé d'affaires, professions toutes valorisantes et valorisées, même si elles sont inégalement lucratives. [...] On n'avance peut-être pas vite dans la magistrature; mais la fonction garde un certain prestige' (Naudin-Patriat, p.126).

²⁰⁸ '[C]onseiller à la cour dès l'âge de trente-six ans, décoré, grâce à l'influence de son beau-père [Grandmorin] et aux services que son père, également magistrat, avait rendus autrefois dans les commissions mixtes' (*Bête* 1085).

²⁰⁹ Séverin Rastoil, for example, 'venait d'être reçu avocat, grâce à la position occupée par son père; celui-ci rêvait anxieusement d'en faire un substitut, désespérant de lui voir se créer une clientèle.' Rastoil senior is the *président du tribunal* in Plassans. Lucien Delangre, son of the mayor of Plassans is seen 'comme une lumière future du barreau' (*Conquête* 1032).

above, but are part of this group, the more humble rural notaries, the small time city lawyers, bailiffs and policemen. Although they figure relatively frequently in the novels, it is usually a matter of a line or two of text. Very few are presented in any detail, the two principal exceptions being M. Baillehache (*Terre*) and M. Grandguillot (*Pascal*). We shall look at these examples briefly and then examine the more general pattern of the presentation of representatives of the legal system in the novels.

It is M. Baillehache who is responsible for drawing up the documents relating to père Fouan's transmission of his land to his children. The novel opens with a lengthy description of the notary's office at Cloyes.²¹⁰ He acts with gentle authority towards his clients, an attitude born of experience of dealing with peasants and the distribution of land.²¹¹ He presents the formal objections to the division of small land holdings into even smaller plots and umpires the heated discussion between the children and their parents as to the pension to be paid to Fouan and Rose.²¹² The all-in argument over the the split of Françoise's and Lise's shares in their father's property does see the notary lose his characteristic cool:

Et une bataille générale, que ni la Grande ni Fouan ne semblaient disposés à empêcher, aurait sûrement fait voler les bonnets et les cheveux, si le notaire n'était sorti de son flegme professionnel. 'Mais, nom d'un chien! attendez d'être dans la rue! C'est agaçant, qu'on ne puisse tomber d'accord sans se battre.'
(*Terre* 699)

He draws sensible lessons from experience. For example, after his dealings with the Fouan family, he vows that from now on he will insist that the documents are signed

²¹⁰ Henri Mitterand chooses this as one of the examples of Zola's use of notes taken on site, in this instance, a visit to the local lawyer at Médan, maître Malet. *Carnets d'enquête. Une ethnographie inédite de la France* (Paris: Plon, 1986), p.591ff.

²¹¹ We learn that he has 'vingt-cinq ans d'habitude professionnelle' (*Terre* 384). This experience has also taught Baillehache when to let his clients clear the air with a particularly heated exchange. At moments like that, he inspects his garden through the window or trims his nails. 'Le notaire achevait de se couper les ongles' (384). 'Et M. Baillehache, qui, depuis la discussion, regardait dans son jardin, les yeux vagues, revint à ses clients, sembla les écouter en se tirant les favoris de son geste maniaque, assoupi par la digestion du fin déjeuner qu'il avait fait' (386). 'M. Baillehache, sans s'émouvoir, repris de sommeil, avait attendu la fin de la querelle. Il rouvrit les yeux, il conclut paisiblement' (390). He remains calm in the face of warring family members: 'M. Baillehache, que ces attitudes dévorantes laissaient calme' (696). He also recommends calm to his clients "'Allez-vous-en, et soyez sages, les bêtises coûtent cher, des fois!'" (700).

²¹² When Jésus-Christ sells off his share, and the land passes out of the family, the notary lectures the wayward son. 'M. Baillehache sermonnait sévèrement Jésus-Christ, et il les renvoya en dissertant sur la loi: la démission de biens était immorale, on arriverait certainement à en élever les droits, pour l'empêcher de se substituer à l'héritage' (*Terre* 648).

before the lots are drawn, to avoid the protracted situation which followed Buteau's refusal to sign when he drew an unfavourable lot.²¹³ So, when he becomes involved in the equally acrimonious division of property between Lise and Françoise Fouan, he insists that the sisters sign the document before proceeding to the drawing of lots (*Terre* 696).

M. Baillehache puts the case for various courses of action in terms that the peasants understand - principally in respect of financial savings or the avoidance of tax.²¹⁴ He also appears to consider pastoral care part of his job. Delhomme asks him to convince Fouan to sell his house in which he is rattling around after Rose's death. The notary suggests that Fouan sell up and move in with the Delhommes.

Elle [la maison] valait bien trois mille francs, il offrait même d'en garder l'argent et de lui en payer la rente, par petites sommes, au fur et à mesure de ses menus besoins. [...] 'A votre âge, il est imprudent de vivre seul; et, si vous ne voulez pas être mangé, il faut écouter votre fille, vendre et aller chez elle.'
(*Terre* 550)

M. Baillehache also runs a little scheme for the avoidance of military service. This is of particular interest to Fanny and Delhomme, who do not want their son Nénesse to be conscripted. As Fanny explains :

'M. Baillehache nous a expliqué une machine, comme qui dirait une loterie : on se réunit à plusieurs, chacun verse entre ses mains une somme, et ceux qui tombent au sort sont rachetés.'²¹⁵

When Delhomme discusses the threat of France going to war with Prussia, he is reassured at least to the extent that he and his wife have saved their son from going to

²¹³ 'M. Baillehache a été furieux, à ce point qu'il a juré de ne plus jamais laisser tirer les lots, avant d'avoir fait signer les papiers...' (*Terre* 468).

²¹⁴ He approves of Fouan's plan to dispose of his land *inter vivos*. "'Je dois ajouter qu'elle [la donation] offre une économie aux familles, car les droits d'héritage sont plus forts que ceux de la démission de biens...'" (*Terre* 384). When Jésus-Christ sells his last plot of land to pay off his debts, 'M. Baillehache, consulté, avait dit qu'il fallait vendre soi-même, et tout de suite, si l'on ne voulait pas être dévoré par les frais' (644).

²¹⁵ *Terre* 425. This was a widespread practice, according to historian Alain Plessis. 'Since 1818, young men who drew an unlucky number could avoid the harsh obligations of a six-or seven-year long military service by "paying for a man"'. He calculates the cost in 1868 at 1700F. 'Replacements constituted an additional inequality in life, a privilege of affluence' (Plessis, p.101).

the front.²¹⁶ As it turns out, Nénesse draws a high enough number to avoid conscription anyway, causing Fanny to regret the investment with Baillehache.²¹⁷

It is ironic that the most detailed portrait of a legal practitioner in *Les Rougon-Macquart* should be of such an exceptional character. M. Baillehache is professional and does not abuse his position, in fact he goes beyond the call of duty in his pastoral interest in his clients, and he makes an effort to speak in a language they understand - as opposed to the local doctor who treats the peasants like animals.²¹⁸ We shall see later how much of the negative presentation of the representatives of the legal system is due to their connection with the regime of the Second Empire. This could, perhaps, explain M. Baillehache's integrity. Zola's interest in *Terre* lies elsewhere than in attacking the government at every opportunity (though he manages a few digs at M. de Chédeville), his focus being a study of the French peasantry. Baillehache is something of a neutral observer charged with refereeing disputes between his peasant clients and dispensing specialist information about the legal system's provisions for the disposal of land.

In *Pascal* the description of M. Grandguillot shows a representative of the legal system more in keeping with the general pattern observed throughout the cycle of novels. He also provides a good example of the widespread practice of clients using their lawyer as a banker.²¹⁹ Pascal, for instance, has authorised Grandguillot to invest his money and dispense the interest quarterly.²²⁰ Pascal's capital and that of the

²¹⁶ "‘J’ai mis de l’argent chez M. Baillehache. Quoi qu’il arrive, Nénesse, qui tire demain, ne partira pas’" (*Terre* 738-739).

²¹⁷ 'Fanny, au lieu de se réjouir, eut un cri de profond regret : ah ! si l'on avait su, on n'aurait pas versé mille francs à la loterie de M. Baillehache' (*Terre* 760).

²¹⁸ 'M. Finet ne répondait pas, habitué à ces interrogations des paysans que la maladie bouleverse, ayant pris le parti sage de les traiter comme les chevaux, sans entrer en conversation avec eux' (*Terre* 714).

²¹⁹ This was common practice at the time. Some characters do not entrust their money to a lawyer. In *Pascal*, Martine keeps her savings elsewhere. Fanny Delhomme (*Terre*) hides her cash in small amounts at different locations on the farm. The phenomenon of the nest-egg is seen in the case of Tante Phasie (*Bête*), in *Ventre* the Quenu household keep their money in a desk in their apartment, as does the Chanteau family (*Joie*).

²²⁰ 'Les sommes déposées chez M. Grandguillot, notaire à Plassans, produisaient une somme ronde de six mille francs de rente' (*Pascal* 951). Pascal has delegated control of the household finances to Martine. 'D'habitude, elle allait toucher elle-même, tous les trois mois, chez le notaire, maître Grandguillot, les quinze cents francs de rente' (1072).

lawyer's other clients disappear when Grandguillot absconds. Local gossip speculates on where the money has gone:

[S]i les uns accusaient simplement M. Grandguillot d'avoir joué à la Bourse, d'autres affirmaient qu'il avait des femmes, à Marseille. Enfin, des orgies, des passions abominables. (*Pascal* 1108)

As we shall see in the next section, it is either sexual or financial impropriety which accounts for the general disrepute of the legal profession in *Les Rougon-Macquart*. It is later alleged that Grandguillot is enjoying the company of two women (neither his wife) in the picturesque Swiss Lakes district.²²¹

Martine reports the lawyer's flight to Pascal and Clotilde.²²² Pascal's disinterest in money does not permit him to share Martine's concern, which she has expressed over the preceding weeks. He remains calm.²²³ Pascal is confident that he can establish his position as a personal creditor, given the written records and receipts he has from the notary for the sums invested.²²⁴ He has a naive certainty that all his funds shall be restored to him.²²⁵ This faith is shattered with confirmation that no creditor shall be satisfied as Grandguillot is bankrupt and in Switzerland, whilst his assets (principally land) are in his wife's name.²²⁶

²²¹ 'Plassans bouleversé racontait que la femme tolérait les débordements du mari, jusqu'à lui permettre les deux maîtresses qu'il avait emmenées au bord des grands lacs' (*Pascal* 1118).

²²² "'Tout de suite, le monde m'a dit qu'il avait filé, qu'il ne laissait pas un sou, que c'était la ruine pour les familles...'" (*Pascal* 1107).

²²³ 'M. Grandguillot en fuite, M. Grandguillot voleur, cela éclatait comme une chose monstrueuse, impossible. Un homme d'une si grande honnêteté! une maison aimée et respectée de tout Plassans, depuis plus d'un siècle! L'argent était là, disait-on, plus solide qu'à la Banque de France' (*Pascal* 1108).

²²⁴ Thyébaud provided Zola with several alternatives for a fraudulent notary scenario. Thyébaud's notes appear in the Pléiade edition (*RM* V 1598-1599).

²²⁵ Pascal does not hesitate to continue spending lots of money on gifts for Clotilde. '[I]l était convaincu que les affaires s'arrangeraient, chez le notaire, et qu'on aurait bientôt beaucoup d'argent' (*Pascal* 1112).

²²⁶ 'D'autre part, les nouvelles devenaient graves, le notaire Grandguillot était décidément insolvable, les créanciers personnels eux-mêmes ne toucheraient pas un sou. D'abord, on avait pu compter sur la maison et deux fermes que le notaire en fuite laissait forcément derrière lui; mais il était certain, maintenant, que ces propriétés se trouvaient mises au nom de sa femme' (*Pascal* 1117).

Pascal's 'insouciance habituelle' (1118) sees him resigned to never recovering his property, so he does not even make an official complaint.²²⁷ It is only when his colleague, Ramond, tells him that a few of Grandguillot's creditors have recovered some of their money, and that his father-in-law would be happy to take on Pascal's case, that the doctor authorises this course of action.²²⁸ The result is a good one, and unlike the other creditors, the particular circumstances of Pascal's dealings with the absconding notary mean that he recovers the lion's share of his investments.²²⁹

Remarks about the general presentation of the representatives of the legal system

As we saw in the case of the notary Grandguillot, there are two main areas in which representatives of the legal system - from the legislature to the most humble of rural lawyers - demonstrate 'bad' behaviour: corruption or women. The representatives of the legal system in *Les Rougon-Macquart* exhibit, in the vast majority of cases, one or more of the following characteristics: hypocrisy, excessive (and unjustifiable) ambition, stupidity, fraud, sharp practice, unscrupulous behaviour, unwholesome sexual interests, political opportunism. M. Baillehache is a rare example of a lawyer untouched by these vices. Apart from him, one is hard pressed to find a single representative of the legal system in *Les Rougon-Macquart* who does not engage in one sort of unsavoury activity or another.²³⁰ The exceptions will be discussed below.

We shall look first at those patterns of corrupt or unscrupulous behaviour. There is the widespread use of political patronage which features in *Excellence* and elsewhere, where people are given responsibilities on the basis of their connections rather than

²²⁷ '[Pascal] négligeait même d'aller voir le procureur de la République, pour causer de son cas, suffisamment renseigné par tout ce qu'on lui racontait, demandant à quoi bon remuer cette vilaine histoire, puisqu'il n'y avait plus rien de propre ni d'utile à en tirer' (*Pascal* 1118).

²²⁸ "'Oui, mon beau-père, M. Lévêque, l'avoué que vous connaissez, m'a parlé hier encore des fonds que vous aviez chez le notaire Grandguillot. Et il vous conseille fortement de vous remuer, car des personnes ont réussi, dit-on, à rattaper quelque chose'" (*Pascal* 1162).

²²⁹ In describing the arrangement, the text draws very closely on the notes from Thyébaud. It is thanks, in part, to the integrity of one of Grandguillot's clerks that such an amount can be recovered (*Pascal* 1169).

²³⁰ Rambaud, who becomes Hélène Grandjean's second husband is a 'notaire de province' (*Page* 823) and he is a steady and patient supporter of his future wife. Little is said about his professional activity, though given his good character we can perhaps assume his integrity.

their qualifications. *Le piston* appears to thwart any notion of meritocracy - fools like M. de Lachesnaye enjoy prominent positions in the legal hierarchy,²³¹ whilst more intelligent individuals such as M. Denizet who, for all his faults, is hard working and a dedicated investigator, suffer in the lower reaches of the profession.

A lawyer consulted by Antoine Macquart in *Fortune* is not interested in his case when it becomes clear that his client cannot afford the cost of legal representation.²³²

Grandguillot, as we saw, defrauded his clients. A provincial lawyer in *Argent* gambles his money and that of his clients on the stock market and makes heavy losses in the collapse of the Banque Universelle, so makes off with what remains of his clients' funds.²³³ There are lawyers who collude with their clients in illegal activities - for example Renaudin and Duveyrier rigged the auction of Vabre's apartment building in *Pot-Bouille*.²³⁴

The second major ground for criticism of the representatives of the legal system is that of their sexual practices. In a fair world, this would be irrelevant, but as these characters make hard-line moral pronouncements in public, their hypocrisy should be exposed.²³⁵ Adultery is endemic amongst representatives of the legal profession. Coming as they do, for the most part, from the bourgeoisie, this is not surprising, given the negative depiction of that social class which appears in the novels. It is a practical proof of the hypocrisy of characters such as Duveyrier, as we saw earlier, and

²³¹ M. de Lachesnaye announces to Denizet that he plans to challenge Grandmorin's will which made generous provision for Séverine. Denizet points out that there are no legal grounds on which to attack it (*Bête* 1085). It is not the only mistake in a matter of law which he makes: 'M. de Lachesnaye, contrairement à la jurisprudence, parlait d'intenter une action en révocation, malgré la mort du donataire, ce qui étonnait de la part d'un magistrat' (1324).

²³² 'Un avoué lui avait conseillé avec des mines dégoûtées, de laver son linge sale en famille, après s'être habilement informé s'il possédait la somme nécessaire pour soutenir un procès' (*Fortune* 115-116).

²³³ 'Cent lettres désespérées étaient arrivées de Vendôme, où le sieur Fayeux, receveur de rentes, avait aggravé le désastre en levant le pied. Dépositaire de l'argent et des titres des clients pour qui il opérait à la Bourse, il s'était mis à jouer lui-même un jeu terrible; et, ayant perdu, ne voulant pas payer, il avait filé avec les quelques centaines de mille francs qui se trouvaient entre ses mains' (*Argent* 354-355).

²³⁴ For all that Renaudin appears to be 'un jeune homme aimable' (*Pot-Bouille* 138), there is gossip about his 'coquinerie' (222).

²³⁵ Valerie Minogue sees this illustrated very clearly in *Nana*. 'Muffat and Chouard, disguising their lust for Nana under cover of a charity mission, and epitomizing the high-placed hypocrisy that in Zola's view characterized the Second Empire' ('Venus observing - Venus observed', in *Centenary Colloquium*, pp.57-72, pp.57-58).

nor does Muffat (*Nana*) practise the religious devotion he preaches.²³⁶ Françoise Naudin-Patriat identifies what appears to be a necessary relationship between dissolute conduct and taking the moral high ground:

Plus on est (ou plus on a été) débauché, plus on se montre intolérant aux faiblesses humaines et intransigeant quand il s'agit de juger la conduite des autres. La débauche a besoin, pour s'effacer, de démonstrations exagérées de prudence et d'un moralisme sans concession. (Naudin-Patriat, p.284)

There is scope in this for a degree of black comedy, as well as potential for satire and irony. Some of the characters associated with the legal system are comical - for example M. de Lachesnaye, the judge who is confused about points of law, or the pathos which borders on the ridiculous in Duveyrier's suicide attempt. In *Terre* the local deputy, M. de Chédeville cuts a comical figure in the constituency - his considerable interest in the local female population compensating for his complete lack of interest in local issues.²³⁷ For example, he scarcely pays any attention to Hourdequin's discussion of problems in the agricultural sector, so keen is he to catch a glimpse of la Cognette in the kitchen.²³⁸ When petitioned by the peasants in Rognes, his attention is diverted towards Berthe Macqueron.²³⁹ There is speculation that it is his taste for the ladies which keeps him from electioneering in Rognes, and, it

²³⁶ This is something which is clear from the novel. Muffat starts by refusing an invitation to a party at Nana's: 'La place d'un homme de son rang n'était pas à la table d'une de ces femmes' (*Nana* 1161). Soon enough he is buying his way into her bed.

²³⁷ Like other representatives of the legal system, he changed allegiance from the monarchy to the Empire and his active love life has been the cause of financial ruin. 'Ce M. de Chédeville, un ancien beau, la fleur du règne de Louis-Philippe, gardait au fond du cœur des tendresses orléanistes. Il s'était ruiné avec les femmes [...] pris sur le tard de l'idée pratique de refaire sa fortune dans les affaires. Grand, élégant encore, le buste sanglé et les cheveux teints, il se rangeait, malgré ses yeux de braise au passage du dernier des jupons' (*Terre* 488).

²³⁸ Hourdequin sent Jacqueline to the kitchen, refusing her demand to sit at the table with them. '[I]l n'y eut que deux couverts, et elle boudait, malgré l'air galant de M. de Chédeville, qui, l'ayant aperçue, avait compris, et tournait sans cesse les yeux vers la cuisine' (*Terre* 488). After Hourdequin's tirade about the rural economy and a barrage of suggestions for reform, which go over the politician's head '[I]a question dépassait de beaucoup les aptitudes de l'ancien beau' (489), the deputy finds some relief in his view through the half-open kitchen door: 'il aperçut le joli profil de Jacqueline, il se pencha, cligna les yeux, s'agita pour attirer l'attention de l'aimable personne' (491). Hourdequin returns to the dining room to find that M. de Chédeville is no longer there. '[I]l finit par l'apercevoir dans la cuisine. Celui-ci avait poussé la porte, et il se tenait là souriant, devant Jacqueline épanouie, à la complimenter de si près, que leurs faces se touchaient presque' (494-495).

²³⁹ 'Mais M. de Chédeville ne l'écoutait pas, ravi de la jolie mine de Berthe, dont les yeux clairs, aux légers cercles bleuâtres, le regardaient hardiment' (*Terre* 497). With a 'ma chère enfant' he accepts her invitation to enter the family café, but is instead obliged to discuss repairs to the church with abbé Godard. 'Très ennuyé, l'ancien beau résistait' (*ibid.*) but to no avail.

is also suggested that this is the cause of his losing the official candidacy for the next election.²⁴⁰

The sexual practices of the representatives of the legal system go, however, beyond mere adultery and recourse to prostitutes. There is a marked pattern of full-on debauchery amongst certain politicians and lawyers. The elderly M. de Plouguern (*Excellence*) defends family values and religion, which is in contrast with his pedigree of debauchery.²⁴¹ Muffat's father-in-law, the marquis de Chouard, is very rarely depicted in the novel outside a compromising situation. This member of the *Conseil d'Etat* is always looking at women with his 'yeux [...] trop polissons' (*Nana* 1137), and many rumours circulate about him 'malgré sa haute piété' (1150). He is vociferous about the law he is drafting to encourage observance of the sabbath, yet arrives at a gathering covered in plaster dust, an image used elsewhere to suggest a recent visit to insalubrious premises (1162).

He is well known amongst the actresses who work with Nana, and when he and Muffat visit the dressing rooms backstage he is completely at home in the distinctly louche environment.²⁴² The prostitute Satin knows his type: "En voilà un vieux sale!" (*Nana* 1225). Chouard follows her and one of the actresses 'excité, se contentant à suivre ces deux vices, avec le vague espoir de quelque complaisance' (1227). He is wealthy enough to pay thirty thousand francs for access to Gaga's young daughter Amélie (1394). Chouard's hypocrisy is finely honed - he breaks all contact with Muffat after his liaison with Nana becomes public knowledge (1424) and yet ends up in Nana's amazing bed himself (1463).

In the depiction of the representatives of the legal system there is also a particular focus on affairs not simply with younger women, but sexual relationships with young

²⁴⁰ Hourdequin is keen to have the incumbent deputy tour the constituency, especially as he has lost the *candidature officielle*. '[I]l pressait M. de Chédeville de faire acte de présence, sans pouvoir l'arracher à quelque jupon sans doute' (*Terre* 678).

²⁴¹ 'Certains jours, il trouvait l'empire immoral, et il le disait tout haut. Lui, avait vécu une vie d'aventures suspectes, très dissolu, très inventif, raffinant les jouissances' (*Excellence* 80). Some rumours suggest that he is Clorinde's father. 'Elle l'appelait parrain, par amitié' (*ibid.*).

²⁴² 'On le sentait à l'aise, connaissant les bons endroits, ragaillard dans cet étouffement de baignoire, dans cette tranquille impudeur de la femme, que ce coin de malpropreté rendait naturelle et comme élargie' (*Nana* 1224). Backstage he attempts to secure the actress Simonne's favours.

girls.²⁴³ The frequency of examples of the latter is astonishing. As Françoise-Naudin Patriat has observed in no uncertain terms:

Parfois, la conduite d'hommes exerçant de hautes fonctions est si dépravée qu'elle dépasse les limites de la licence, de l'indécence ou du libertinage. [...] Ces hommes souvent âgés paraissent apprécier particulièrement les très jeunes adolescentes, pour ne pas dire les petites filles, qui appartiennent en général à des milieux populaires. (Naudin-Patriat, p.264)

There are two detailed cases in the novels. Baron Gouraud (*Curée*) has a predilection for very young girls, in which he indulges at great risk to his reputation and membership of the Senate.

[I]l se vendait avec majesté et commettait les plus grosses infamies au nom du devoir et de la conscience. Mais cet homme étonnait encore plus par ses vices. Il courait sur lui des histoires qu'on ne pouvait raconter qu'à l'oreille. Ses soixante-dix-huit ans fleurissaient en pleine débauche monstrueuse. A deux reprises, on avait dû étouffer de sales aventures, pour qu'il n'allât pas traîner son habit brodé de sénateur sur les bancs de la cour d'assises.²⁴⁴

And let us not forget Grandmorin, the murder victim in *Bête*, who is associated with a pattern of sexual abuse of young girls, as we saw in the earlier discussion of Denizet's investigation.²⁴⁵ He raped both Séverine and Louisette, Flore's sister. Flore tells Jacques that she knew about Grandmorin's practices.²⁴⁶ Opposition newspapers suggest a cover-up which protects the victim who was 'adonné aux pires débauches' (1076). The deceased's sister is also aware of his foibles, but appears

²⁴³ A very rare example where such tastes are given to a character unconnected to the legal system is that of the clockmaker in the rue de la Goutte-d'Or, where the addition of incest gives a sensational edge to the relationship. 'L'horloger d'en face, ce monsieur pincé, avait failli passer aux assises, pour une abomination : il allait avec sa propre fille, une effrontée qui roulait les boulevards' (*Assommoir* 637).

²⁴⁴ *Curée* 395. In order to gain Gouraud's support, Saccard enlists the help of his sister, Sidonie Rougon, to extricate the baron from a difficult situation. 'Il mit en rapport sa sœur et le baron, alors compromis dans une histoire des moins propres. [...] Mme Sidonie [...] promit au baron de traiter avec certaines gens, assez maladroits pour ne pas être honorés de l'amitié qu'un sénateur avait daigné témoigner à leur enfant, une petite fille d'une dizaine d'années' (*Curée* 396). She has some experience in the area, having already arranged a settlement of 3000F between a nobleman with an interest in 'les petits soupers et les filles très jeunes' (370) and the family of the girl concerned.

²⁴⁵ Grandmorin has had a prestigious legal career, described by F.C. Ramond as '[u]ne des plus belles carrières de la magistrature' (*Les personnages des "Rougon-Macquart"* (Paris: Charpentier, 1925), p.171).

²⁴⁶ "'D'ailleurs, j'en savais déjà sur le président, parce que j'avais vu des saletés, ici, lorsqu'il venait avec des jeunes filles..." (*Bête* 1041).

convinced that his elevated social position protects him from any slurs on his character. In her words, her brother 'aimait la jeunesse'. Indeed.²⁴⁷

It is not only the older representatives of the legal system who have a taste for young flesh. Sandoz and Claude's friend, the lawyer Pouillaud, has been caught in the company of very young girls,²⁴⁸ and the sniper Ducat, a bailiff, has a similar preference. He appears as counsel for the defence in the 'trial' of the German spy, Goliath:

Ducat, le petit gros, un ancien huissier de Blainville, forcé de vendre sa charge après des aventures malpropres avec des petites filles, venait encore de risquer la cour d'assises, pour les mêmes ordures, à Raucourt, où il était comptable, dans une fabrique. (*Débâcle* 513)

There are references in the novels to prostitution rackets where young girls are supplied to well-placed men, amongst whom must, by definition, feature representatives of the legal system. Duveyrier is charged with the investigation of one such case in *Pot-Bouille*.²⁴⁹ Another features in *Conquête*.

On découvrit qu'une bande de toutes jeunes filles, presque des enfants, avaient glissé à la débauche en galopinant dans les rues; et l'affaire n'était pas seulement entre gamins du même âge, on disait que des personnages bien posés allaient se trouver compromis.²⁵⁰

The negative depiction of representatives of the legal system is relieved in only a tiny minority of cases. We have already seen the positive example of Baillehache (and perhaps Rambaud) and there are three others who appear to be principled individuals - untarnished by the self-interest, hypocrisy and sexual depravity which characterise the vast majority of their colleagues. There is a lawyer in *Excellence* who leaves his

²⁴⁷ As she tells Denizet: "Ce que je sais, c'est qu'il gardait son rang, et qu'il est resté jusqu'au bout un homme du meilleur monde" (*Bête* 1090). She prefers to credit Louisette, the victim, with a 'débauche précoce' (1091) and finally attempts to close the matter by concluding: "Mon Dieu! je ne dis point que mon frère n'ait pas voulu plaisanter avec elle. Il aimait la jeunesse, il était très gai, sous son apparence rigide. Enfin, mettons qu'il l'ait embrassée" (1092).

²⁴⁸ 'Pouillaud, l'ancien farceur du dortoir, devenu un avoué si grave, avait des ennuis, pour s'être laissé pincer avec des petites gueuses de douze ans' (*Œuvre* 332).

²⁴⁹ 'C'était un scandale qui passionnait Paris, toute une prostitution clandestine, des enfants de quatorze ans livrés à de hauts personnages' (*Pot-Bouille* 183).

²⁵⁰ *Conquête* 975. The judge Paloque does not support Marthe Mouret's project to fund an educational facility for a group of young girls in the town. "Des petites coquines! [...] J'ai eu de jolis détails,

estate to a religious order, a testamentary provision which leads to the Charbonnells' attempts to recover the property with Rougon's help.²⁵¹ In the same novel the notary Martineau is pursued for his republican beliefs. We will discuss this below. The father of Renée Saccard, M. Béraud Du Châtel, is a man of principle, who resigned from the judiciary rather than serve on a *commission mixte*. He shares his family's republican tendencies and acts on his faith. Rather than participate in these arbitrary bodies, he withdraws from public life.

Lui-même était un de ces républicains de Sparte, rêvant un gouvernement d'entière justice et de sage liberté. Vieilli dans la magistrature, où il avait pris une roideur et une sévérité de profession, il donna sa démission de président de chambre, en 1851, lors du coup d'Etat, après avoir refusé de faire partie d'une de ces commissions mixtes qui déshonorèrent la justice française.²⁵²

This obvious connection with republicanism explains the oppression of these individuals under the Second Empire. There are other examples where the legal profession is associated with general opposition to the prevailing political order. In *Fortune*, for example, it is a group of lawyers who resist the Rougons' attempts to take control of the town. They are motivated in part by republican convictions,²⁵³ but mainly they oppose the Rougons on the ground that they are *parvenus*.²⁵⁴ In Camy-Lamotte and Denizet's assessment of the Grandmorin trial, we saw the concern expressed if the lawyer for the defence opposed the government, as he would be likely to dig into the deceased's past for details which would reflect badly on the regime (*Bête* 1116).

aujourd'hui, au Palais. Ce sont elles qui ont provoqué à la débauche des gens très honorables"" (*Conquête* 982).

²⁵¹ 'Un de leurs petits-cousins, un sieur Chevassu, avoué à Faverolles, le chef-lieu d'un département voisin, était mort en laissant une fortune de cinq cent mille francs aux sœurs de la Sainte-Famille' (*Excellence* 53).

²⁵² *Curée* 379. Others have no compunction about serving on the *commissions mixtes*. Rougon's brother-in-law, Beulin-d'Orchère is one such individual (*Excellence* 106) as is M. de Lachesnay's father (*Bête* 1085).

²⁵³ Republican views, according to James McMillan, were a characteristic of this group. 'Students, too, frequently harboured republican sympathies, as did disaffected bourgeois (often lawyers) who, when the time was right, could emerge as leaders of the republican cause' (McMillan, *Napoléon III*, p.64).

²⁵⁴ 'L'impopularité brusque des Rougon était l'œuvre d'un groupe d'avocats qui se trouvaient très vexés de l'importance qu'avait prise un ancien marchand d'huile, illettré, et dont la maison avait risqué la faillite' (*Fortune* 257).

Earlier a possible relationship between the legal system and justice was suggested. How does this relationship look now? What confidence can we have in the legal system as a vehicle for justice, given the disparaging depiction of those characters who are charged with its construction, administration and enforcement? Even discounting the general sort of justice envisaged by the miners in *Germinal* and setting our sights lower - what sort of justice does the legal system under the Second Empire offer?

Justice is never stated as an objective, and it was explicitly sacrificed by Camy-Lamotte and Denizet. Justice seems to be an alien concept in an environment where patronage rather than meritocracy is the order of the day. We saw this in both the operation of individual characters, such as Rougon and the help he afforded his 'bande', and also in its institutionalisation through the practice of the *candidature officielle*. If they do deal in justice, and there is no indication that this is their concern, it is of a far more limited variety - it is justice for them - the representatives of the legal system define it in line with the perpetuation of their own social dominance. Let us retain this whiff of Darwinism and the possibility that the legal system operates, not as an alternative to the injustices of Darwinism, but as an reinforcement of them.

At the conclusion of *Germinal* Etienne wondered if 'la légalité un jour, pouvait être plus terrible' (1590). As we have seen 'la légalité' operating in the novels, 'terrible' appears an accurate description. This section ends with a tentative suggestion that the overwhelmingly negative presentation of the representatives of the legal system is due to their intimate connection with the Second Empire. This analysis reserves the possibility that in hands informed by an alternative political agenda, a legal system could operate as a force for justice. This is the objective of the revolutionary characters we shall meet in Chapter Four.

So, as we enter the final section of this chapter, how does the land lie? We have seen how the dissatisfaction with the Darwinian nature of the universe in *Les Rougon-Macquart* has led to a call for justice, which is framed by some characters in relation to the legal system. The legal system, we concluded, could operate as a neutral force in the novels, and it even appeared to offer the possibility of countering the injustices

of Darwinism, although this potential was not realised in the examples seen in the novels. Our indulgent view of the legal system has been challenged by the negative depiction of those charged with its creation and management. There is still a measure of hope for a legal system as a vehicle for justice if we attribute the negative depiction of its representatives to their connection with the regime of the Second Empire. The next section looks at how the legal system is exploited for political ends which seems likely to close the door on a relationship between the legal system, particularly as it operates in this cycle of novels, and justice.

The ideological function of the legal system

We have seen the connection established between the political regime of the Second Empire and the legal system, and we saw Eugène Rougon, Delcambre and Camy-Lamotte moving along that interface. There is no question that the legal system functions as an arm of the Establishment. We should underline the double meaning of 'arm' at this early juncture. That a legal system operates as a branch or wing of a government is a commonplace. What is perhaps a little less clear, due to its not being openly acknowledged, is how the legal system has the potential to operate as a weapon in the hands of the government. It is with this aspect that we are concerned here. There are obvious implications, both Darwinian and for justice, as we shall see.

We shall see how, like the army, the legal system and police are used by the regime in the pursuit of its political objectives. The ideological function of the legal system is seen most clearly when the regime considers itself to be under threat. It is apparent in the steps the regime takes to deal with its opponents, including its recourse to the provisions of the legal system relating to repression and censorship, such as the *loi de sûreté générale* and laws controlling the press.

Les Rougon-Macquart catalogue the twenty year span of the Second Empire.²⁵⁵ From the coup d'état and the bloody reprisals against the republican insurgents (*Fortune*)

²⁵⁵ The legal system also has an important function in the establishment of a regime, primarily through the removal of any residual opposition, as explained by Françoise Naudin-Patriat : 'Dans les époques

through the institution of the hard-line Empire in response to the assassination attempt on the Emperor (*Excellence*), to the cynical manipulation of the legal system to prop up the collapsing regime (*Bête*), there is a chronological pattern of imagined threats and disproportionate responses throughout the cycle. The repression of the Second Empire pursues a political objective, and as such it is fair to say that the legal system is used ideologically in the novels. This is complemented by the use of the law for explicitly moral purposes, as we shall see towards the end of this section.

We saw how the political establishment hijacks Denizet's investigation and ensures that elements of his inquiry are stifled to protect the regime's good name. Discussing *Bête*, Françoise Naudin-Patriat draws an uninspiring conclusion on the political use of the legal system in that novel:

Il fait une analyse sociologique de la justice en exposant les moyens dont disposent les autorités publiques pour éviter le scandale: les pressions du ministre de la Justice (ou de son représentant) sur le juge d'instruction, l'arrivisme des magistrats qui ne résistent pas aux promesses d'avancement. Le romancier aborde là le problème de l'indépendance des juges par rapport au Pouvoir et de l'inégalité sociale des citoyens face à l'institution. (Naudin-Patriat, p. xix)

In her study of 'l'ordre social' in *Les Rougon-Macquart*, Naudin-Patriat points out that when one element of the social order is under threat, then, in the manner of the legendary musketeers, the other elements act together to save the edifice from crumbling.²⁵⁶ Opponents of the regime are defied, therefore, to tussle with the full force at the Empire's disposal. The government can also call on its varied supporters to unite against a common threat.²⁵⁷ For example, in *Germinal* the legal system operates in conjunction with the police and the armed forces, where the police enforce

troublées, la justice, surtout soucieuse de rapidité, ne s'encombre pas d'une procédure minutieuse, d'une instruction sérieuse; elle fonctionne à certains moments sous la forme de tribunaux d'exception; les commissions mixtes composées de magistrats et de militaires ont jugé, après les événements du coup d'Etat, les individus dont le Pouvoir voulait se débarrasser. [...] Aux lendemains du coup d'Etat du 2 décembre 1851 et après la défaite de la Commune, la justice est expéditive, sommaire; les condamnations, le plus souvent arbitraires en raison des modalités de fonctionnement des tribunaux, sont très sévères' (Naudin-Patriat, p.217).

²⁵⁶ 'Ces pouvoirs, intimement liés entre eux, sont solidaires: que l'un soit menacé, et c'est tout l'ensemble qui l'est, d'où l'intervention des organes de l'Etat' (Naudin-Patriat, p.xviii).

²⁵⁷ The political persuasions of the Empire's supporters cover a wide range, as Henri Guillemin shows, but they pull together in their common interest: 'Légitimistes, orléanistes, bonapartistes, ultramontains, ces messieurs ont leurs querelles; pour l'instant, union sacrée, l'ennemi est là: ce régime si lourd de menaces à l'égard des structures sociales dont ils sont les bénéficiaires' (Guillemin, *Présentation*, p.13).

the law against assembly when Pluchart addresses the miners in la veuve Désir's meeting room.²⁵⁸

The official resistance intensifies in direct proportion to the perceived threat the miners pose to the regime. Hennebeau's dispatches to his masters in Paris have evidently convinced forces in the capital of the potential danger of an uprising among mineworkers in the north of France. Severe repression 'pour encourager les autres' ensues. As the strike endures, the police presence in the area is supplemented by an army regiment, and the stand-off culminates in a direct conflict between the unarmed miners and the armed forces, during which several of the miners are killed.

This is a very good example of the Establishment's response being disproportionate to the actual (as opposed to the perceived) menace in question. Throughout the cycle of novels the Second Empire appears to adopt a policy of self-preservation through the harsh repression of the smallest potentially threatening incident. And the legal system is their weapon of choice, backed up with armed force if necessary, as Françoise Naudin-Patriat explains:

Quand celui-ci [l'Etat] semble menacé, le Pouvoir se défend et durement, au besoin par la force armée. [...] La répression est la réponse brutale du Pouvoir en temps de crise.²⁵⁹

The opening novel of the cycle presents a clear example of the hard line response to threats which will characterise the regime of the Second Empire. The insurgents in *Fortune* are poorly led and badly equipped.²⁶⁰ Like the revolutionary characters we

²⁵⁸ 'C'était le commissaire de l'arrondissement qui arrivait, un peu tard, pour dresser procès-verbal et dissoudre la réunion. Quatre gendarmes l'accompagnaient. Depuis cinq minutes, la veuve les amusait à la porte, en répondant qu'elle était chez elle, et qu'on avait bien le droit de réunir des amis. [...] Déjà, le commissaire frappait à coups de poing; et, comme on n'ouvrait pas, il menaçait d'enfoncer la porte. Un mouchard avait dû parler, car il criait que la réunion était illégale, un grand nombre de mineurs se trouvant là sans lettre d'invitation' (*Germinal* 1349). Thanks to la veuve Désir's stalling of the policemen and her hurried warning, the miners are able to break up their meeting and leave by a back entrance before the police gain access to the meeting room. Disappointed by their lack of success, the police threaten to have la veuve Désir imprisoned for obstruction.

²⁵⁹ Naudin-Patriat, p.xx. 'Dans les situations de crise le gouvernement réplique brutalement par la force. [...] [M]alheur à ceux qui se révoltent contre l'ordre établi, qui luttent pour plus de justice et de bonheur, ils seront traités comme des ennemis féroces' (203).

²⁶⁰ For example, the insurgents' leadership 'avait négligé de prendre les plus simples précautions' (*Fortune* 214). The leaders are described as 'réellement incapables' and they commit 'fautes

shall see in the next chapter, they have a simplistic attitude towards taking power. In their enthusiasm, they do not conceive of any resistance to their movement.²⁶¹ Their naive idealism comes up against the wall of the massed might of the Second Empire, whose response to their opposition to the coup d'état is rapid and brutal. The courage and commitment of the insurgents count for nothing in the face of armed force.

Les bourgeois et le Pouvoir font payer très cher la panique qu'ils ont ressentie : ils prennent une revanche qui, par l'horreur de la répression, doit inspirer la terreur. [...] Le rapport de forces est inégal entre les défenseurs de l'ordre et les révoltés : les premiers ont pour eux l'armée, la police, les tribunaux; les seconds n'ont souvent que leurs poings nus et leur idéal. (Naudin-Patriat, p.203)

The reprisals are extensive against the insurgents. Not only are they pursued mercilessly 'chassés par la troupe comme une bande de bêtes' (*Fortune* 219) but the soldiers continue their fire after being ordered to cease.²⁶² As the troops make their way to relieve Plassans, they leave clear indications of their attitude towards those who resist them:

Le retour des troupes, après le carnage de la plaine des Nores, fut marqué par d'atroces représailles. Des hommes furent assommés à coups de crosse derrière un pan de mur, d'autres eurent la tête cassée au fond d'un ravin par le pistolet d'un gendarme. Pour que l'horreur fermât les lèvres, les soldats semaient les morts sur la route. On les eût suivis à la trace rouge qu'ils laissaient. Ce fut un long égorgement. A chaque étape, on massacrait quelques insurgés. [...] Quand la troupe eut campé à Plassans, sur la route de Nice, il fut décidé qu'on fusillerait encore un des prisonniers, le plus compromis. Les vainqueurs jugeaient bon de laisser derrière eux ce nouveau cadavre, afin d'inspirer à la ville le respect de l'Empire naissant.²⁶³

The Second Empire starts as it means to go on. In *Ventre* there is an ideological double whammy - first the use of the legal system to punish the establishment's

irréparables' (213). Their disorganisation and poor equipment are compared to the well-organised government troops who attack them (214).

²⁶¹ 'Ces hommes, qui marchaient dans l'aveuglement de la fièvre que les événements de Paris avaient mise au cœur des républicains, s'exaltaient au spectacle de cette longue bande de terre toute secouée de révolte. Grisés par l'enthousiasme du soulèvement général qu'ils rêvaient, ils croyaient que la France les suivait, ils s'imaginaient voir, au-delà de la Viorne, dans la vaste mer de clartés diffuses, des files d'hommes interminables qui couraient, comme eux, à la défense de la République. Et leur esprit rude, avec cette naïveté et cette illusion des foules, concevait une victoire facile et certaine' (*Fortune* 163).

²⁶² 'Il y eut là un effroyable massacre. Le colonel Masson et le préfet, M. de Blériot, pris de pitié, ordonnèrent vainement la retraite. Les soldats, furieux, continuaient à tirer dans le tas, à clouer les fuyards contre les murailles, à coups de baïonnette' (*Fortune* 219-220).

²⁶³ *Fortune* 307. The result is the summary execution of Silvère and the peasant Mourgue, the latter killed simply as he happens to be manacled to the target of the policeman Rengade's personal vendetta.

opponents, and secondly its use - through the show trial of Florent and his alleged accomplices - to distract public attention from the passage of unpopular tax measures through the parliament.

Florent is twice deported for opposing the regime of the Second Empire. His involvement in the opposition to the coup d'état is due to a chance encounter where, after being in a crowd which was chased by troops, he falls in with some people who construct a barricade. He falls asleep on the barricade and wakes to find himself surrounded by police, his fellow protesters having disappeared. His hands were bloodied during the earlier police chase in which a woman standing near him was killed, and this factor marks him out as a dangerous suspect.²⁶⁴ His revolutionary interest is desultory at best, and the threat he presents to the regime negligible. He escapes execution, unlike some other unfortunates.²⁶⁵ A summary trial suffices:

Lorsqu'il parut devant un juge d'instruction, sans témoins d'aucune sorte, sans défenseur, il fut accusé de faire partie d'une société secrète; et, comme il jurait que ce n'était pas vrai, le juge tira de son dossier le chiffon de papier : 'Pris les mains couvertes de sang. Très dangereux.' Cela suffit. On le condamna à la déportation. (*Ventre* 612)

Two years after being deported with four hundred others to Cayenne, Florent makes his way back to France, spurred on by his affection for Paris and his desire to live there quietly as before. He returns to the scene of his alleged crime, and, soon enough, history repeats itself. This time he is implicated in a political organisation, set up as its leader by Logre, one of the regime's undercover informants.²⁶⁶ Florent is so ineffectual that the challenge he presents to the regime remains small. At no time are the authorities unaware of his movements - he has been tracked since his return to Paris.

²⁶⁴ 'On le conduisit à un poste voisin, en laissant au chef du poste cette ligne écrite au crayon sur un chiffon de papier: "Pris les mains couvertes de sang. Très dangereux." Jusqu'au matin, il fut traîné de poste en poste. Le chiffon de papier l'accompagnait' (*Ventre* 611).

²⁶⁵ 'Et Florent se rappelait qu'on avait manqué le fusiller là, contre le mur de Saint-Eustache. Un peloton de gendarmes venait d'y casser la tête à cinq malheureux, pris à une barricade de la rue Grenéta' (*Ventre* 611). Florent only escaped this fate as the police who arrested him had swords and not firearms. He also eludes another firing squad arranged by a group of drunken soldiers.

²⁶⁶ 'Logre également lui témoignait une grande amitié. Il s'était fait son lieutenant. [...] Florent restait le chef, l'âme du complot' (*Ventre* 844).

Les commissaires de police du Havre, de Rouen, de Vernon, annonçaient l'arrivée de Florent. Ensuite, venait un rapport, qui constatait son installation chez les Quenu-Gradelle. Puis, son entrée aux Halles, sa vie, ses soirées chez M. Lebigre, pas un détail n'était passé. (*Ventre* 862)

When Lisa Quenu decides to report Florent to the police (her limit was reached when Florent spent his share of the hard-earned Gradelle inheritance on his revolutionary project) she is told that the authorities have the matter in hand, and that she is far from the first to denounce him. She is shown the voluminous dossier which has been compiled.²⁶⁷

The regime keeps tabs on potential troublemakers, and pounces when it suits. For both the regime and Florent, a pretext for action presents itself in the shape of unpopular tax legislation.²⁶⁸ Judging that public support for political change will rise with the publicity surrounding the new law, Florent wanders about Paris, putting the final touches to his plans, having decided that now is the time for action. He returns to find the police waiting for him. Far from being a difficult prisoner, Florent comes along quietly.²⁶⁹

Deux mois plus tard, Florent était de nouveau condamné à la déportation. L'affaire fit un bruit énorme. Les journaux s'emparèrent des moindres détails, donnèrent les portraits des accusés, les dessins des guidons et des écharpes, les plans des lieux où la bande se réunissait. Pendant quinze jours, il ne fut question dans Paris que du complot des Halles. La police lançait des notes de plus en plus inquiétantes; on finissait par dire que tout le quartier Montmartre était miné. Au Corps législatif, l'émotion fut si grande, que le centre et la droite oublièrent cette malencontreuse loi de dotation qui les avait un instant divisés, et se réconcilièrent, en votant à une majorité écrasante le projet d'impôt impopulaire, dont les faubourgs eux-mêmes n'osaient plus se plaindre, dans la panique qui soufflait sur la ville. Le procès dura toute une semaine. Florent se trouva profondément surpris du nombre considérable de complices qu'on lui donna. Il en connaissait au plus six ou sept sur les vingt et quelques, assis au banc des prévenus. (*Ventre* 892)

²⁶⁷ As the official tells her: "Voyez-vous, c'est qu'on m'assomme depuis plus d'un an avec cette affaire-là. On me fait dénonciation sur dénonciation, on me pousse, on me presse. Vous comprenez que si je n'agis pas, c'est que je préfère attendre. Nous avons nos raisons..." (*Ventre* 862).

²⁶⁸ 'Une occasion suffisante de mécontentement se présentait pour lancer dans Paris les bandes insurrectionnelles. Le Corps législatif, qu'une loi de dotation avait divisé, discutait maintenant un projet d'impôt très impopulaire, qui faisait gronder les faubourgs. Le ministre, redoutant un échec, luttait de toute sa puissance. De longtemps peut-être un meilleur prétexte ne s'offrirait' (*Ventre* 869).

²⁶⁹ 'Cependant, dans la chambre, Florent se laissait prendre comme un mouton. Les agents se jetèrent sur lui avec rudesse, croyant sans doute à une résistance désespérée. Il les pria doucement de le lâcher' (*Ventre* 888). He sits quietly by as they assemble the evidence to be removed from his room, before accompanying them to the police station.

This is a particularly instructive example of the operation of the social order and its use of the legal system. The press which, as we shall see, was strictly controlled by the government, adds to the general hysteria which detracts attention from the controversial legislation which passes smoothly through a united parliament. The left and right wing factions forget their differences and work together against a common enemy which threatens their rule. Clearly a set-up, there is something of the show trial about Florent's court appearance. Once again sentenced to deportation, Florent's punishment at the hands of the regime is disproportionate to the threat he represented.

We alluded above to the muzzling of the press. Censorship of the press as well as repression of opponents of the government, particularly those with republican beliefs, are seen very clearly in *Excellence*.²⁷⁰ Once again, the legal system and its representatives are used in the pursuit of ideological objectives, to wit the continued stability of the incumbent regime. We saw in *Fortune* how seriously the republican threat was taken by the regime in the wake of the coup d'état, and how violent were the reprisals against the government's opponents. Georges Pradalié confirms that there is historical accuracy in Zola's depiction of the repression of those who had resisted the coup d'état.²⁷¹

There is a slightly more subtle, but no less brutal, programme of repression pursued in the sixth novel of the cycle. There are two aspects of repression in *Excellence* which interest us here. The first is the targeting of Republican opponents to the regime, and we should notice that representatives of the legal system who are compromised in anti-government activities are particularly singled out for strict attention - as they are guilty of letting the side down. The second is the control of the press.

The practice of arrest quotas came into effect after Orsini's failed assassination attempt on Napoléon III. Orsini was executed for the attack in which several people

²⁷⁰ Discussing the press law of 17 February 1852, Françoise Naudin-Patriat says : 'Toute presse d'opposition pouvait être ainsi bâillonnée comme pouvait être étouffée toute tentative de critique dans la presse fidèle à l'Empire' (Naudin-Patriat, p.188).

²⁷¹ 'Mais la répression est rude : 27 000 personnes sont arrêtées dont plus de 12 000 en province. Dans chaque département, les commissions mixtes, composées du préfet, du procureur-général et d'un officier reçoivent des pouvoirs discrétionnaires. Seul, l'envoi à Cayenne, il y en aura 240, ne peut être

were killed and many more injured. If one compares the punishment in this case with those of Silvère and the miners, there does not seem to be much distinction made between an assassination attempt on the Head of State and some low-level, ill-planned revolutionary activity. Evidently, as far as the Second Empire is concerned, treason is treason. It suggests a regime whose response is both disproportionate and indiscriminate. Amongst the repercussions of the failed assassination attempt is a government crackdown, represented in *Les Rougon-Macquart* by the recall of Rougon to the Ministry of the Interior, and the passage of the *loi de sûreté générale* which empowers the Minister to deport political opponents of the regime.²⁷² The main targets are Republicans:

[L]es républicains allaient être traqués et déportés; c'était le coup de balai des dix mille suspects, oubliés le 2 décembre.²⁷³

In a delicate period, the response of the regime to its opponents will be fierce.²⁷⁴ The Ministry of the Interior operates a quota system for the arrest of republicans. The Minister, Rougon, explains the background to the policy to the *préfet* of the Somme:

'Vous n'ignorez pas que le parti révolutionnaire relève la tête. Nous avons été à deux doigts d'une catastrophe épouvantable. Enfin, le pays demande à être rassuré, à sentir au-dessus de lui l'énergique protection du gouvernement. De son côté, Sa Majesté l'empereur est décidée à faire des exemples.' (*Excellence* 241).

He tells the *préfet* that his patch is among the worst for 'gangrène républicaine' (*Excellence* 241) and for that reason, '[i]l faut donc que la répression y soit

décidé que par les conseils de guerre. Dix mille personnes sont transportées en Algérie, dont 5000 dans les camps ou les forts; 10 000 sont bannies' (Pradalié, *Second Empire*, p.8).

²⁷² 'L'empereur, en appelant Rougon au pouvoir, voulait des exemples. Il connaissait sa poigne de fer; il lui avait dit, au lendemain de l'attentat, dans la colère de l'homme sauvé: "Pas de modération! il faut qu'on vous craigne!" Et il venait de l'armer de cette terrible loi de sûreté générale, qui autorisait l'internement en Algérie ou l'expulsion hors de l'empire de tout individu condamné pour un fait politique' (*Excellence* 217). Richard B. Grant describes the passage of the law in the wake of the Orsini incident: 'In order to implement the Emperor's decree, the legislature passed, with only minor opposition, the loi de sûreté générale, which provided that anyone who had ever been a troublemaker might be deported to Algeria, or even beyond - to Cayenne or Lambessa' (R.B. Grant, *Excellence*, p.46).

²⁷³ *Excellence* 217. 'The law, soon called 'law of suspects', was aimed chiefly at the republicans; it stipulated that any individual having planned to act against the government was liable to a fine or imprisonment, and that anyone who had already been sentenced for political motives since 1848 could be arrested, deported and exiled without trial' (Plessis, p.145).

²⁷⁴ 'Dans les périodes où le Pouvoir veut affirmer son autorité et sa force sur l'opposition, il décide de faire procéder à des arrestations arbitraires dont il attend un effet dissuasif' (Naudin-Patriat, p.217).

éclatante'(241-242). Everything is worked out with apparent mathematical logic, though from which hat the total required was drawn is never identified:

'On a dû répartir sur toute la France le nombre d'arrestations jugées nécessaires. Le chiffre pour chaque département est proportionné au coup qu'il s'agit de porter...'²⁷⁵

By this arbitrary system, in the Haute-Marne three arrests will suffice, as opposed to the fifteen required in the Meuse. The *préfet* of the Somme has a dozen arrests to make. Before he leaves, he requests clarification of the situation - will he be given a list of designated victims, or be allowed to exercise some discretion in the matter. Rougon's reply indicates the government's policy - hit high and hit hard:

'Oh! arrêtez qui vous voudrez! ... Je ne puis pas m'occuper de ces détails. Je serais débordé. Et partez ce soir, procédez aux arrestations dès demain ... Ah! pourtant, je vous conseille de frapper haut. Vous avez bien là-bas des avocats, des négociants, des pharmaciens, qui s'occupent de politique. Coffrez-moi tout ce monde-là. Ça fait plus d'effet.'²⁷⁶

One detailed example presented in *Excellence* is the arrest of the notary Martineau. The specific targeting of members of the legal profession compromised in anti-government activity is demonstrated in this case, which also has implications for the pattern of political patronage which was discussed earlier. The choice of Martineau fulfils several different agendas - the punishment of the regime's political opponents, the demonstrable disapproval of representatives of the legal system who have broken ranks with the regime, and also the satisfaction by Rougon of the demands of a member of his gang. Mme Correur informs Rougon of the extent of her brother's involvement in republican politics:

²⁷⁵ *Excellence* 242. The issue of quotas becomes relevant in the case of the notary Martineau, brother of Mme Correur, one of Rougon's 'bande', who alleges that her sister-in-law is working to have her excluded from the notary's will. Rougon suggests Martineau as a possible target, to which the *préfet* Du Poizat replies: "Mon Dieu, je ne pensais pas à lui. On l'a dénoncé. J'ai reçu des lettres ... Il est certain qu'il s'occupe de politique. Mais il y a déjà eu quatre arrestations dans le département. J'aurais préféré, pour arriver au nombre de cinq que vous m'avez fixé, faire coffrer un professeur de quatrième qui lit à ses élèves des livres révolutionnaires"(253). Insisting on Martineau, Rougon identifies it as a 'question de salut public'(ibid.).

²⁷⁶ *Excellence* 242. To ensure the *préfet*'s complete cooperation, Rougon adds: "Je ne vous cacherai pas," reprit-il, "que Sa Majesté est très mécontente en ce moment du personnel administratif. Il pourrait y avoir bientôt un grand mouvement préfectoral. Nous avons besoin d'hommes très dévoués, dans les circonstances graves où nous sommes"(242). This has the required effect, as the *préfet* promises to follow instructions: "[Q]uant aux avocats, ils ne manquent pas, c'est une peste ... Oh! j'assure à Son Excellence que je trouverai les douze..."(243).

'Martineau devenait républicain. Aux dernières élections, il s'était exalté et avait fait une propagande acharnée pour le candidat de l'opposition. [...] [J]'ai questionné les gens, j'en ai appris encore plus long. Martineau a fait toutes les bêtises. Ça n'étonnerait personne dans le pays, s'il était arrêté. On s'attend à voir les gendarmes l'emmener d'un jour à l'autre...'²⁷⁷

Rougon instructs Gilquin, his shady associate, and Du Poizat, the *préfet* of the relevant catchment, to arrest Martineau. Gilquin stage manages the arrest so as not to hinder his attendance at a ball in the evening. Things do not, however, proceed as planned - the police do not arrive at the scheduled time, and then there is difficulty arranging for transport. Frustrated that his social engagement is now compromised, Gilquin proceeds in the brutal fashion of which Rougon knows him to be capable.

Jostling the infirm lawyer, who is obviously unwell, Gilquin and the police proceed with the arrest, in spite of the wife's concerns about her husband's health. 'Gilquin haussa les épaules. Il était décidé à emmener le notaire mort ou vif' (*Excellence* 267). By the time Martineau is bundled into the carriage, he has fainted, and the cold weather is doing him no good. The prison superintendent refuses to take charge of such an ill prisoner, so Gilquin deposits Martineau at a hotel, and rushes across the square to the ball, which is still in progress. Shortly afterwards, news arrives to Rougon that Martineau has died, a revelation which shakes the Minister.²⁷⁸

The Martineau episode returns to haunt him. Following a cabinet meeting the Emperor quizzes Rougon on this matter and on other exercises of his ministerial power:

Rougon donna tranquillement des détails. Ce Martineau était un homme très compromis, un républicain dont l'influence dans le département pouvait offrir de grands dangers. On l'avait arrêté. Il était mort. 'Oui, justement, il est mort, c'est cela qui est fâcheux,' reprit le souverain. 'Les journaux hostiles se sont emparés de l'événement, ils le racontent d'une façon mystérieuse, avec des

²⁷⁷ *Excellence* 250. Further damning details include Martineau's refusal to accompany his wife to church, his association with a former lawyer, the pair of them allegedly discussing 'de choses terribles' (251), dubious comings and goings *chez* Martineau under the cover of darkness and quantities of suspicious post arriving from abroad.

²⁷⁸ 'Pour la première fois, il eut conscience d'un trou devant lui, d'un trou plein d'ombre, dans lequel, peu à peu, on le poussait. Voilà que cet homme était mort, maintenant! Jamais il n'avait voulu cela. Les faits allaient trop loin' (*Excellence* 271).

réticences d'un effet déplorable ... Je suis très chagrin de tout cela, monsieur Rougon.²⁷⁹

This reference to the press picks up an important aspect of the repression we see depicted in the novel. The issue of censorship and the control of the press is a further example of the use of the law to pursue ideological objectives. The strong hand which Rougon exercises after the assassination attempt on Napoléon III is seen also in his treatment of the press. This importance assigned to control of the press is an acknowledgement of its power. Georges Pradalié explains the control of newspapers under the regime:

Pour publier un journal, il faut une autorisation gouvernementale, verser un cautionnement, payer pour chaque exemplaire un droit de timbre élevé. Si la censure n'a pas été établie, le gouvernement a trouvé un moyen beaucoup plus efficace, le système des 'avertissements'. Après plusieurs avertissements, le gouvernement peut suspendre le journal pour deux ou trois mois. Ce droit de suspension peut aussi intervenir si la direction du journal a changé, ou sa ligne politique.²⁸⁰

We witness an interview between a newspaper owner and the Minister. Rougon lectures him and outlines the perils of the press: 'Elle désorganisait, elle démoralisait, elle poussait à tous les désordres' (*Excellence* 243). He displays the copy which he has marked in red, and enumerates his objections. Principal amongst his complaints is that the paper appears to 'mettre en doute l'infailibilité du gouvernement en matière de répression' (244). But the real beef the Minister seems to have lies elsewhere:

'Et le pis, monsieur, c'est que personne n'ignore les liens qui vous attachent à l'administration. Comment les autres feuilles peuvent-elles nous respecter, si les journaux que nous payons ne nous respectent pas?' (*Excellence* 244)

There is absolutely no pretence as to the nature of the arrangement between the regime and the papers which it allows to operate. They must function as an obedient organ for the government. The newspaper owner promises to sack the editors responsible and offers to send Rougon a proof copy each morning.

²⁷⁹ *Excellence* 291. Rougon has no support left at court. 'La cour, en effet, s'était de nouveau mise contre lui. On l'accusait maintenant d'abuser du pouvoir, de compromettre l'empire par ses brutalités. Les histoires les plus extraordinaires couraient sur son compte, les corridors du palais étaient pleins d'anecdotes et de plaintes, dont les échos, chaque matin, arrivaient dans le cabinet impérial' (*ibid.*).

²⁸⁰ Pradalié, *Second Empire*, pp.37-38.

That Rougon takes a harder line than those around him is clear in the discussion at the Cabinet meeting of *les Veillées du bonhomme Jacques*, a literary publication destined for the peasantry. He objects to the specific volume on the grounds that it is dangerous, given its treatment of themes such as witchcraft, socialism and trades unions, all of which are equally pernicious as far as Rougon is concerned.²⁸¹ It is also a pretext for the Minister to examine the dangers of chap-books in general.

'Le colportage aurait de graves dangers si, devenant une arme entre les mains des révolutionnaires, il aboutissait à raviver les discussions et les haines. La commission [de colportage] a donc le devoir de rejeter tous les ouvrages fomentant et irritant des passions qui ne sont plus de notre âge. Elle accueillera au contraire les livres dont l'honnêteté lui paraîtra inspirer un acte d'adoration pour Dieu, d'amour pour la patrie, de reconnaissance pour le souverain. [...] Le nombre des mauvais livres augmente tous les jours, [...] [c]'est une marée montante contre laquelle on ne saurait trop protéger le pays. Sur douze livres publiés, onze et demi sont bons à jeter au feu. Voilà la moyenne ... Jamais les sentiments coupables, les théories subversives, les monstruosité anti-sociales n'ont trouvé autant de chantres...' (*Excellence* 284)

It is important to note the clear connection in the Minister's mind between freedom of the press and dangerous revolutionary activity. To repress the latter one must suppress the former. On the contrary, the only acceptable use of such material, in his view, is for the promotion of the regime and its values.²⁸² Rougon claims that the firm hand which the Emperor requested when naming him Minister of the Interior requires him to stand against any hint of opposition to the regime, such as the insinuations he believes are contained in *les Veillées du bonhomme Jacques*. He addresses his appeal to the head of state:

'Le danger n'est pas dans les prérogatives excessives du pouvoir, mais dans l'absence des lois répressives. Si vous retiriez votre main, vous verriez bouillonner la lie de la populace, vous vous trouveriez tout de suite débordé par les exigences révolutionnaires et vos serviteurs les plus énergiques ne sauraient

²⁸¹ As he explains to Clorinde: "Une ânerie, un de ces volumes qu'on fabrique pour les paysans. Cela s'appelle *les Veillées du bonhomme Jacques*. Il y a de tout là-dedans, du socialisme, de la sorcellerie, de l'agriculture, jusqu'à un article célébrant les bienfaits de l'association ... Un bouquin dangereux, enfin!" (*Excellence* 277). There is a similar publication in *Terre*, though in that case it is a Bonapartist tract entitled *Les Malheurs et le triomphe de Jacques Bonhomme* (*Terre* 428).

²⁸² We saw earlier in this chapter how Rougon defended his brother Saccard - a rumour at one of the General Meetings of the *Banque Universelle* suggests that Rougon's support was conditional upon the newspaper operated by Saccard pursuing a pro-government line: 'Rougon, le ministre, le frère du directeur, était disposé à favoriser l'Universelle, si le journal de la société, *l'Espérance*, un ancien organe catholique, défendait le gouvernement' (*Argent* 168).

bientôt plus comment vous défendre ... Je me permets d'insister, tant les catastrophes du lendemain seraient terrifiantes. La liberté sans entraves est impossible dans un pays où il existe une faction obstinée à méconnaître les bases fondamentales du gouvernement.'²⁸³

Here we see the full extent of Rougon's authoritarian belief, and the importance he attaches to the repression of opposition. Rougon appears to believe that the smallest threat could topple the edifice, which perhaps justifies the apparently disproportionate responses we saw earlier in this chapter. Rougon places control of the press at the top of his repressive agenda, as otherwise it could prove a useful weapon in the hands of the regime's opponents:

'La presse est le réceptacle de tous les ferments nauséabonds. Elle foment les révolutions, elle reste le foyer toujours ardent où s'allument les incendies. Elle deviendra seulement utile, le jour où l'on aura pu la dompter et employer sa puissance comme un instrument gouvernemental...' (*Excellence* 289)

What is relevant for our purposes here is the explicit connection Rougon makes between control of the press and political power, a connection which explains the importance attached to censorship in the novel.

We have seen several instances in *Excellence* of the use of the legal system for ideological or political purposes. The legal system is one of the official weapons in the regime's arsenal, others include the police and the military. Unofficial alternatives include the secret police to which reference is made several times in both this novel and in *Ventre*, where a web of police informants denounces Florent to the authorities. There are also disreputable individuals like Gilquin, whom Rougon charges with unsavoury tasks, such as the arrest of the notary Martineau.

The ideological objectives pursued by the Second Empire relate principally to the continuation of the regime, but there are occasions where the legal system is used in the pursuit of moral objectives, or at least in pursuit of morality as defined by the public statements of the hypocritical bourgeoisie. The censorship of literature, enforced observance of the sabbath and laws against divorce are examples of this.

²⁸³ *Excellence* 288. Rougon goes on to criticise the relative freedom of the *Corps législatif* and to point out that although the imperial majority was overwhelming in the recent elections, five opposition candidates were nevertheless returned by the electorate.

Another example is the practice of street raids against prostitutes which complement the police harassment of the working girls. Satin, for example, lives in fear of incarceration at the legendary women's prison at Saint-Lazare.²⁸⁴ Like other representatives of the legal system, the police are not immune to using their position for their own gratification, in this case they extract sex from the prostitutes for promise of protection.²⁸⁵ There is a 'brutale agression' (*Nana* 1315) in the exercise of their powers.²⁸⁶

A Darwinian disenfranchisement?

The law's potential for misogyny is suggested in *Nana*, and is reflected in a revealing reference to Nana's conception of the legal system:

Elle avait toujours tremblé devant la loi, cette puissance inconnue, cette vengeance des hommes qui pouvaient la supprimer, sans que personne au monde la défendît. (*Nana* 1315)

Nana's powerlessness is born of two factors - first, her class background and second, her gender.²⁸⁷ Is there a discernible gender bias in the operation of the legal system? Claiming that laws designed to protect the property rights of women do not achieve their stated goal, Françoise Naudin-Patriat examines the protection afforded to wives by the various regimes covering matrimonial property, and finds it ultimately illusory.

²⁸⁴ She transmits this fear to Nana, who already shares something of her mother Gervaise's fear of the police. 'Satin lui faisait une peur abominable de la police. Elle était pleine d'histoires, sur ce sujet-là' (*Nana* 1314). The following passage describes the panic during a raid: '[L]a débandade effarée des longues queues fuyant à travers la foule. C'était une épouvante de la loi, une terreur de la préfecture, si grande, que certaines restaient paralysées sur la porte des cafés, dans le coup de force qui balayait l'avenue' (1315).

²⁸⁵ Satin, for example, protected herself in this fashion. 'Autrefois, elle couchait avec un agent de mœurs, pour qu'on la laissât tranquille; à deux reprises, il avait empêché qu'on ne la mît en carte; et, à présent, elle tremblait, car son affaire était claire, si on la pinçait encore' (*Nana* 1314).

²⁸⁶ 'Les agents, pour avoir des gratifications, arrêtaient le plus de femmes possible; ils empoignaient tout, il vous faisaient taire d'une gifle si l'on criait, certains d'être soutenus et récompensés, même quand ils avaient pris dans le tas une honnête fille. L'été, à douze ou quinze, ils opéraient des rafles sur le boulevard, ils cernaient un trottoir, pêchaient jusqu'à des trente femmes en une soirée' (*Nana* 1314-1315).

²⁸⁷ Buteau, for example, whose attitude is expressed in similar terms - 'pouvoir obscur' (*Terre* 649) complements the 'puissance inconnue' used here - is only disadvantaged by his class.

Dans les familles riches, la fortune personnelle de la femme paraît à l'abri des convoitises du mari, dans la mesure où un contrat de séparation de biens a protégé les biens propres de la femme. Cependant, les précautions juridiques n'empêchent pas l'ingérence du mari dans la gestion des biens de sa femme. (Naudin-Patriat, p.89)

We saw this when Renée's aunt was keen to preserve Renée's assets from the communal matrimonial property regime (*Curée* 383). Saccard is willing to agree to this, knowing that the Code will not present an obstacle to his plans, and his smooth comments soothe the aunt's concerns.

'Par grâce,' dit-il, 'finissons-en avec cette désagréable question d'argent ... Mon avis est que mademoiselle Renée doit rester maîtresse de sa fortune et moi maître de la mienne. Le notaire arrangera cela.'²⁸⁸

Renée's lack of interest in protecting her rights, beyond a sentimental attachment to the Charonne properties, and Saccard's careful manipulation of her needs for money, see him acquire control over the very lucrative sites. In *Nana*, Sabine Muffat has retained ownership of her property, but she cannot sell it without her husband's consent.²⁸⁹ Françoise Naudin-Patriat considers that the gender bias in the law simply reflects the perceived biological weakness of women.

C'est par un argument tiré de la Nature que les juristes justifiaient la hiérarchie entre les époux consacrée par la maxime : le mari doit protection à sa femme, la femme obéissance à son mari.²⁹⁰

There are clear Darwinian implications here and, interestingly for our purposes, the law is apparently used to counteract the weakness (physical and social) of the woman

²⁸⁸ *Curée* 382. 'Le contrat fut établi sur le régime de la séparation des biens qui conserve aux époux l'entière administration de leur fortune. La tante Elisabeth qui écoutait attentivement le notaire, parut satisfaite de ce régime dont les dispositions semblaient assurer l'indépendance de sa nièce, en mettant sa fortune à l'abri de toute tentative' (384).

²⁸⁹ The irony of the situation is that Muffat needs money to pay off Nana-induced debts, and Sabine's property is all the couple have left. The only way out is: 'vendre les Bordes, une magnifique propriété, estimée à un demi-million, qu'un oncle venait de léguer à la comtesse. Seulement, il fallait la signature de celle-ci, qui, elle-même, par son contrat, ne pouvait aliéner la propriété, sans l'autorisation du comte' (*Nana* 1418).

²⁹⁰ Naudin-Patriat, p.78. Discussing *Pot-Bouille*, she continues: 'Cette faiblesse, cette infériorité 'naturelle' ancrée dans les traditions et consacrée par le droit est là, dans le roman, démentie par l'existence de silhouettes féminines singulièrement dominatrices.' Mme Josserand is the obvious example of this. She cites examples elsewhere in the cycle of Lisa Quenu, Félicité Rougon, Mme Chanteau and Clorinde Balbi.

by affording her property an added layer of protection, even if, as in the Muffat example, what is given with one hand is signed away with the other. It appears, however, that in general it is class rather than gender which represents the ultimate distinction in the legal system.

We saw in the section on the prominence of the legal system that there is an across-the-board awareness of the presence of the legal system - characters from all social classes declare their births, deaths and marriages, and the legal system's power and punitive potential are appreciated by most. But we can see a class bias in a system whose provisions deal principally with property, a bias confirmed in the pattern of recourse to this system by the propertied classes.

There is, however, a much deeper sense of disenfranchisement perceived (albeit indistinctly) by those already effectively excluded, on property grounds, from the legal system. These are characters who have a vague feeling that the legal system does not belong to them. Lacking the property which might make the legal system interested in them, these characters have also been on the receiving end of a history of oppression at the hands of those they perceive to be the 'owners' of the legal system. It has been drummed into their class from time immemorial that justice (and 'la justice') belongs to the princes only.

There are several clear examples where lower class characters fear the legal system - perhaps born of experience of harsh treatment at its hands. It is, for example, a characteristic of both Gervaise and her daughter Nana, who have been subject to what appears to be a class-based operation of the legal system. The treatment of the urban working class in *Assommoir*, for example, shows how they, like the prostitutes in *Nana*, are subject to police harassment.

The attitude of the peasantry towards the legal system can be seen in the timorous respect the Fouan family exhibit in the opening scene at Baillehache's office. The fear is perhaps the result of a recognition of the power that the legal system can hold over the vulnerable, the peasants are only too aware of the punishment handed out to poachers, which reflects a class bias, as it is only one class which needs to resort to

theft to eat.²⁹¹ To an extent the legal system is a force which operates in an ill-explained but threatening manner above the peasants' heads.²⁹² This is seen in a reflection attributed to Buteau when he decides, with bad grace, to pay his taxes, even though he disagrees with the manner of their calculation. The local tax-collector has put the case simply - if Buteau does not pay then he will have to deal with the bailiff.

Effrayé, ahuri, Buteau rentra sa rage. Quand on n'est pas le plus fort, faut bien céder; et sa haine séculaire venait encore de grandir avec sa peur, contre ce pouvoir obscur et compliqué qu'il sentait au-dessus de lui, l'administration, les tribunaux, ces feignants de bourgeois, comme il disait. Lentement, il sortit sa bourse. (*Terre* 649)

The peasants appear to view the legal system in Darwinian terms - it has certainly replaced God in their world as the source of protection and punishment. This is seen in their response to the abbé Godard's fulminations against the godlessness of their community:

Ils l'écoutaient tous, curieusement, avec la parfaite indifférence, au fond, de gens pratiques qui ne craignaient plus son Dieu de colère et de châtement. A quoi bon trembler et s'aplatir, acheter le pardon, puisque l'idée du diable les faisait rire désormais, et qu'ils avaient cessé de croire le vent, la grêle, le tonnerre, aux mains d'un maître vengeur? C'était bien sûr du temps perdu, valait mieux garder son respect pour les gendarmes du gouvernement, qui étaient les plus forts. (*Terre* 597)

For all the awareness of the power of the legal system and its impact on their lives, there is an explicit view amongst the peasants of Rognes that it is better not to wash one's dirty linen before the legal system.²⁹³ Whilst they respect it, they also fear it. At Fouan's graveside, Fanny and Jésus-Christ wonder if they should instigate legal action against their brother Buteau to acquire their fair share of their deceased father's

²⁹¹ In *Terre*, reference is made to the age-old struggle between poacher and landowner. 'La chasse, c'est l'enragement héréditaire, c'est l'antique prérogative féodale qui autorisait le seigneur à chasser partout, et qui faisait punir de mort le vilain ayant l'audace de chasser chez lui' (*Terre* 430). In an additional irony, the law is enforced in this novel by the gamekeeper Bécu, of the same social class as the principal poacher, Jésus-Christ.

²⁹² Guy Robert describes their attitude as one of distrust. 'Leur défiance s'étend à l'appareil administratif et judiciaire' (*"La Terre" d'Emile Zola : étude historique et critique* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1952), p.326).

²⁹³ Jean Macquart fought with Buteau and broke his arm. 'Même, un instant, il avait craint que celui-ci ne le menât en justice, à cause de son bras cassé, qui lui interdisait tout travail, bien qu'à moitié raccommodé déjà. Mais Buteau, sans doute, avait pensé qu'il n'est jamais bon de laisser la justice mettre le nez chez soi' (*Terre* 613).

property. They decide not to.²⁹⁴ This is in keeping with Delhomme's comments immediately after Fouan's death, where although the family are pretty sure that Buteau and Lise killed the old man and stole his remaining assets, they close ranks against the outside influence. Literally closing out the world by shutting the door and windows as the family shout their accusations against Buteau, Delhomme calls for calm.

Aussi finit-il par déclarer que de pareilles affaires n'étaient pas à dire. On serait bien avancé, si les voisins entendaient. On irait en justice, et les bons y perdraient peut-être plus que les mauvais. Tous se turent : il avait raison, ça ne valait rien de laver son linge sale devant les juges. (*Terre* 799)

Far from having confidence in the legal system as a source of justice, the peasants seem to view it as something of a lottery. The history of the dispensation of justice is presented in *Terre*, where the peasants listen to Jean Macquart reading from the Bonapartist tract *Les Malheurs et le triomphe de Jacques Bonhomme*. The Darwinian nature of 'la justice' in pre-Revolutionary times is quite clear, against which equity struggled unsuccessfully.

Maintenant, il en était à la justice, à cette triple justice du roi, de l'évêque et du seigneur, qui écartelait le pauvre monde suant sur la glèbe. Il y avait le droit coutumier, il y avait le droit écrit, et par-dessus tout il y avait le bon plaisir, la raison du plus fort. Aucune garantie, aucun recours, la toute-puissance de l'épée. Même aux siècles suivants, lorsque l'équité protesta, on acheta les charges, la justice fut vendue.²⁹⁵

²⁹⁴ Recourse to the legal system by Jésus-Christ would represent a surprising change in attitude. When caught poaching by the gamekeeper Bécu, and forced to write an official statement, he finds a scatological manner in which to make his views clear. 'Il regardait le papier, méditait une farce, quelque chose où il mettrait tout son mépris de l'écriture et de la loi. Brusquement, il leva la cuisse, glissa le papier, bien en face, en lâcha un dessus, épais et lourd, un de ceux dont il disait que le mortier était au bout. "Le v'là signé!"' (*Terre* 642). By the same token, his threat of legal action must be considered humorous, especially given the moral tone he adopts. Upon discovery of the sexual games being played by his daughter and Bécu's son, he threatens an official complaint. "Je vas écrire au préfet, pour qu'il te casse, père de cochon, cochon toi-même!" (554).

²⁹⁵ *Terre* 429. There is also an historical overview of conscription amongst the peasantry, which is relevant to the episode of conscription which occurs at the end of the novel. Reference is also made to the punishment by death of poaching, another activity which occurs several times in the novel, in episodes involving Jésus-Christ and his friend Bécu, the gamekeeper. We mentioned earlier the harsh punishment of the poacher Chantegreil in *Fortune*, sentenced to deportation.

The peasants seem to expect that the way things were might well become again the way things are.²⁹⁶ It should come as no surprise, however, given their negative experience of oppression and injustice in the past that the peasants should be sceptical about the legal system as a vehicle for justice, and dubious as to whether it could ever operate in their interest.

Other characters from the lower classes perceive that the legal system is not designed to work for them. In *Bête*, for example, Flore considers writing to the police and confirming the rumours about Grandmorin and his relationship with Séverine, which would give Séverine a motive for murder:

Elle avait tant souffert, qu'un soir elle s'était cachée, voulant écrire à la justice; car ce serait fini, si elle pouvait faire arrêter cette femme; et elle qui avait surpris autrefois ses saletés avec le président Grandmorin, se doutait qu'en apprenant ça aux juges, elle la livrait. Mais, la plume à la main, jamais elle ne put tourner la chose. Et puis, est-ce que la justice l'écouterait? Tout ce beau monde devait s'entendre. Peut-être bien que ce serait elle qu'on mettrait en prison, comme on y avait mis Cabuche.²⁹⁷

She has seen at close quarters how 'tout ce beau monde' treated Cabuche. Flore's feeling of disenfranchisement is shared by the café owner Lengaigne (*Terre*) who expresses his dissatisfaction with M. Hourdequin, the mayor and local landowner, and the negotiations with central government over the subsidy for a new road.

'Ah! ces bourgeois d'aujourd'hui, c'était pis encore que les seigneurs d'autrefois : oui, ils avaient tout gardé, dans le partage, et ils ne faisaient des lois que pour eux, ils ne vivaient que de la misère du pauvre monde!' (*Terre* 415)

Lengaigne's observation shows how characters see the legal system as another way by which the landed classes secure their position over everybody else. We have seen how the property bias of the legal system favours those who are already socially

²⁹⁶ 'Puisque ça s'était passé comme ça, dans le temps, peut-être bien que ça pouvait revenir' (*Terre* 430).

²⁹⁷ *Bête* 1248. This possibility of Flore alerting the authorities is mentioned by Jacques to Séverine, warning her that Flore might take revenge. 'D'autre part, elle devait connaître beaucoup de choses, car il se rappelait son allusion aux rapports du président avec une demoiselle, que personne ne soupçonnait, qu'il avait mariée. Si elle savait cela, elle avait sûrement deviné le crime : sans doute allait-elle parler, écrire, se venger par une dénonciation' (1230).

dominant.²⁹⁸ Françoise Naudin-Patriat considers that the bourgeoisie has managed to make the lower classes see politics as something which does not make an impact on their lives and about which they can do nothing - the result of this indifference is that their disenfranchisement becomes total.²⁹⁹ In the novels it appears to extend to the legal system as well. The social supremacy of the bourgeoisie is thus guaranteed:

Grâce à la conception qui fait de la politique un domaine particulier dans lequel les gens ordinaires n'ont pas à intervenir, les classes aisées sont sûres de maintenir les classes laborieuses dans la passivité, sauf peut-être le temps d'une révolte sporadique.³⁰⁰

We have now seen clear examples of the regime's use of the legal system to pursue ideological ends, through their laws on censorship and repression of opposition to the government. This appropriation of the legal system for their own purposes, a more subtle complement to the class and gender based exclusivity which we have mentioned, means that it should come as no surprise to us that characters such as Flore and Lengaigne have no confidence in the legal system's ability to represent their interests, or, for that matter, to deliver justice. The gender and class bias of the legal system as it operates, both in its ideological sense and otherwise, in *Les Rougon-Macquart* underlines how limited are the interests which it serves and protects. This would appear to disqualify the legal system both as a source of justice and as a means of tempering the inequalities of a Darwinian universe.

Let us look, for instance, at the three trials depicted in the cycle. This is the situation perhaps most obviously associated with the legal system in action. There is Florent's trial (*Ventre*) and the well-known one of Cabuche and Roubaud (*Bête*). There is also the parody of a courtroom scene in *Débâcle* where the snipers put the Prussian spy,

²⁹⁸ Discussing *Germinal*, Henri Mitterand identifies how the legal system and its forces of law and order operate in the bourgeoisie's favour. 'D'un autre côté, les forces de l'Etat (préfet, gendarmerie, armée) apparaissent sans fard dans leur rôle répressif, au service de la bourgeoisie' ('*Germinal* et les idéologies', *CN*, 42 (1971), 141-152, p.150).

²⁹⁹ 'La politique est ainsi coupée de la vie quotidienne, elle ne semble avoir aucune incidence sur la condition matérielle des travailleurs; ceux-ci auront toujours de quoi vivre, quelle que soit la nature du régime. [...] La politique finalement n'a aucune réalité pour le peuple, elle n'en a sans doute que pour ceux qui en font leur métier' (Naudin-Patriat, p.235).

³⁰⁰ Naudin-Patriat, p. 238. We have seen how the regime responds to a 'révolte sporadique'. She adds that '[l]'indifférence à la question politique est le fait d'une grande partie du peuple.' Roubaud and Goujet are identified as rare examples of working class characters with political views, in their case republican.

Goliath Steinberg, on trial and find him guilty before proceeding to an execution of the 'defendant'.³⁰¹

In each case, what happens in the courtroom - the supposed theatre of truth and justice - offends against any generally accepted notion of justice. To start with, each is a set-up for political ends. In each case the chances of the defendant proving their innocence are nil. The odds, and the system itself, are stacked against them. Each is a clear example of the weak being oppressed by the strong. Each result, however, having been generated by the apparently reliable means of a trial (in all cases with defence representation) receives a stamp of apparent justice. There is a use of the legal system to give an appearance of justice, but what has eventuated in each case is a scarcely disguised application of Darwinian principles. The operation of the legal system as a Darwinian force in the novels seems ever more blatant.

The impression from the novels is that the legal system belongs to the upper classes, and that the victims of the legal system are repeatedly the poor and the already disadvantaged. It comes, therefore, as no surprise that these 'faibles' have no confidence in the legal system as a means to challenge the dominion of the 'forts'. The inhabitants of Rognes have their scepticism about the legal system confirmed by centuries of history where 'la justice' has meant anything but that for them.

Having seen the legal system perpetuate the status quo, the peasants do not view their continued servitude at the hands of the landowners and the lack of justice emanating from the legal system as purely coincidental. It perhaps also explains why characters like Buteau seek other forms of dispute resolution - such as taking the law into their

³⁰¹ For Christiane Moatti, it is clearly a Darwinian encounter. 'Mais les circonstances de sa mort ôtent à celle-ci tout caractère glorieux pour ceux qui la lui donnent. La victime réduite à l'impuissance, devient pitoyable et le bourreau qui fait durer le supplice, odieux et sadique' ('Goliath Steinberg, l'espion allemand de *La Débâcle* : un procès à rouvrir?', in *Miscellanées Mitterand*, pp. 299-314, p.308). Moatti identifies irregularities present in the mock trial, such as Sambuc acting as both prosecutor and judge in the trial, operating on the basis of unproven evidence, and taking as the starting point of the trial that Goliath is guilty. 'Ainsi le procès de l'homme est entendu et le verdict prononcé d'avance. Durant la parodie de procès qu'il fera subir ensuite à l'homme réduit à l'impuissance et bâillonné, l'accusation se fait de plus en plus grave, mais les preuves et les témoignages à charge demeurent toujours anonymes' (p.310). The other trials share these characteristics, though the gags on the defendants are symbolic rather than real. The verdicts are decided in advance, and based on unproven evidence and denunciations.

own Darwinian hands. Surely flagrant Darwinism is preferable to a cynically disguised version of it operating with a class bias and calling itself 'la justice'?

How justice is denied by the legal system in *Les Rougon-Macquart*

We had two principal objectives in our examination of the legal system in *Les Rougon-Macquart*. Was the legal system a vehicle for justice and did it counteract the injustices of a Darwinian universe? This chapter has seen the progressive dashing of rather high hopes. We saw how, in theory, the legal system could operate as a check on Darwinism, before seeing how this potential remains completely unrealised in *Les Rougon-Macquart*.

The legal system does not live up to the promise of justice suggested by its very name. It appears to operate as a disguised Darwinian order, so rather than providing relief from the Darwinian universe in the novels, the legal system merely reinforces that injustice, aggravated by the cynical addition of the promise of justice which is never delivered. Far from being an antidote to these injustices, the legal system is another measure of Darwinian venom.

The Darwinian operation of the legal system is seen in two ways. The first is the more obvious use of the legal system as a Darwinian tool to promote and protect the interests of the regime. We saw this in the use of the legal system to repress opposition to the regime, and also in the various ways the regime kept control of the social order. The widespread political patronage and the phenomenon of the *candidature officielle* guaranteed a grateful and obedient legislature, and kept political opponents out.

The second Darwinian feature of the legal system ensures that another class of opponent is also excluded from the picture. These are the oppressed classes, the weak and the vulnerable - the 'faibles', the ones for whom a legal system should work, but instead their experience has shown them that the legal system operates for their masters and against them. We saw how this disenfranchisement was sensed by the

peasants and enunciated by Flore and Lengaigne. They have no reason to believe that the legal system will ever intervene in their favour, and so never put it to the test, thereby excluding themselves from any protection it might have offered them.

The legal system has been definitively established as an arm of the government. We have seen the calibre of those characters who represent the legal system in the novels, and concluded that they do not inspire confidence in the legal system as a vehicle for anything other than self-interest and preservation of their wealth and status. Any general notion of justice cannot stem from a system as biased as this one in favour of the already socially dominant class. As we saw earlier, the best sort of justice in which the legal system deals in the novels is in the very restricted sense defined by those who make and administer the laws - justice for the ruling class, justice for the princes and their friends only. This is clearly demonstrated in the use of the legal system for the regime's ideological objectives, in which we saw patterns of repression and censorship. The sort of justice the legal system deals in is thus of a very compromised nature.

Could one go so far as to suggest that the legal system deals in injustice? Let us look again at two of the principal examples of legal action undertaken by individuals in the novels. Bourras wins his case against Mouret, but at what cost? Pauline's lack of will means that the legal basis on which she could challenge the Chanteau family's exploitation of her fortune is not given a chance to work. The laws in question in these situations are not in themselves unjust, in spite of the property bias they reflect. In the guardianship cases there is a sensible statutory intention to protect the property of vulnerable wards, and in the tenancy situation, the rights of tenants are also protected. Similarly, matrimonial property measures designed to protect wives' assets suggest a sound legislative intention.

The problem lies not with the laws, but with the system. A system characterised by a lack of enforcement, or, more accurately, a pattern of selective enforcement. The operation of the legal system in *Les Rougon-Macquart* threw up a curious combination. Good laws and bad enforcement on one hand, and bad laws and good

enforcement on the other. In a sense, enforcement is the nub of the matter, relating as it does to the system rather than the laws themselves.

One only needs to see where the legal system swings most clearly into action in the novels - the pursuit of the regime's ideological objectives, show trials with political overtones, cleaning the streets of prostitutes to present a positive image to those visitors attending the World Fair. The clearest examples of the legal system at work in the novels are when it is used by the government as a Darwinian tool. Zola keeps the focus on the legal system being used ideologically or politically in the novels, thereby labouring the connection between the legal system and the regime.

Ambiguous at best, the operation of the legal system is compromised by its association with a corrupt regime - the connection with the Second Empire appears fatal for 'la justice'.

It is surely no coincidence that the two most detailed accounts of the legal system which appear in *Les Rougon-Macquart* confirm so closely the tie between the legal system and the government. In *Excellence*, it is the censorship and repression of opponents to the regime which dominate. The account of Denizet's investigation of the series of murders in *Bête* is characterised by interference in the inquiry from the highest level.

Zola's depiction of the *préfet* - that civil servant whose place is at the interface between government and legal system - has come in for criticism. Françoise Naudin-Patriat claims that Zola painted these civil servants very black indeed. As opposed to the 'fonctionnaires prudents' and the 'bureaucrates avisés' of historical reality, she describes Zola's *préfets* as follows:

Au mieux, ce sont des personnalités fades, [...] futilles ou frivoles. [...] Au pire (ils sont alors plus dangereux), ce sont de jeunes arrivistes promus dans le sillage de quelque grand homme; leur seul scrupule est d'obéir aux ordres du Ministre de l'Intérieur.³⁰²

³⁰² Naudin-Patriat, p.190. We can recognise Du Poizat from *Excellence* in this description. She suggests that this served Zola's desire to show imperial society dominated by 'l'arrivisme, le cynisme, l'esprit d'intrigue' (*ibid.*).

It may seem a small and specific case, but this particular example serves to support an important element in the presentation of the legal system in the novels. We identified the harsh treatment of the regime of the Second Empire as one of Zola's objectives, and saw clearly how the regime was discredited in the novels. The atmosphere of political patronage and the use of public office for private ends, the negative portrait of those characters associated with the legal system, as well as the emphasis on its ideological use, overshadowed any potential the legal system might have had as a vehicle for justice.

The legal system in *Les Rougon-Macquart* is clearly, and fatally, linked to the Second Empire which is itself presented as being incompatible with justice. Zola's own description of Eugène Rougon, the man created by the Second Empire and who serves it absolutely, illustrates this point:

[L]e sens de la justice lui manque, il est un digne soutien de l'empire.³⁰³

It appears that, in this specific case of the Second Empire, it is the regime which is incapable of delivering justice. This reserves the possibility that a legal system, under another regime, might be able to deal in justice.

What will become more clear after the next chapter on the revolutionary characters, however, is the difficulty of any legal system operating as a force for justice. This is due to the inherent characteristics of a legal system, the majority of which stem from its very association with the regime which established it. For example, there is the issue that any legal system will inevitably be used for the ideological ends of the regime which created it. It will be designed and used to protect its own social order. The legal system will always be the must-have accessory for this year's regime.

As we have seen throughout this chapter, the legal system operates as a particularly effective arm of the government of the Second Empire, and this could be equally true of any government. Discussing the powers which the Second Empire accorded itself

³⁰³ *RM* V 1773. This is in the first plan for the cycle of novels which Zola submitted to Lacroix.

to secure its position, Françoise Naudin-Patriat points out that it was neither the first nor the last regime to so do:

L'Empire se les donne, comme d'autres régimes avant lui, comme d'autres régimes après lui : de la répression des opposants au coup d'Etat (1851) ou des manifestants grévistes à celle des Communards (*La Débâcle*), on a changé de régime, passant du Second Empire à la troisième République, mais les procédés restent les mêmes; ils servent le même but, par-delà la différence des gouvernements : maintenir l'ordre à tout prix. (Naudin-Patriat, p.175)

These inherent, and inevitable, difficulties will also become apparent in the next chapter, as the revolutionary characters propose their alternative political orders. We can see a hint of this in the first novel of the cycle where both the insurgents and the mayor present their case 'au nom de la loi' (*Fortune* 154). Their proposed alternatives to the Second Empire will have to face the same problems that regime faced - namely how to cope with opponents and situations which threaten their continued political control. Will they succeed where the Second Empire has failed and realise the potential of a legal system to counteract the injustices of Darwinism?

CHAPTER FOUR

JUSTICE DENIED II : REVOLUTION

By the end of the previous chapter, the legal system seemed a very unlikely source of justice in *Les Rougon-Macquart*. We observed that few of those involved in its creation and administration seemed to factor justice into the operation of 'la justice'. We also saw that much of its unsuitability for the delivery of justice came from the legal system's intimate association with the regime of the Second Empire.

In this chapter we are going to find explicit demands for justice and, unlike those we saw earlier from *Germinal*, these ones feature as part of more formulated programmes for political reform. These reforming characters are setting up an explicit alternative to the Second Empire. Could it be that the revolutionaries represent a possible source for justice in the novels? Having identified problems inherent in a political regime's delivery of justice, we must keep our hopes in check for an alternative source of justice being established by these characters.

Many of the direct references to justice in *Les Rougon-Macquart* are attributed to a small group of characters, whom we shall describe as revolutionaries. Their explicit demands for justice make them very exciting for our purposes. We shall, however, proceed with caution, as the message - a call for justice - is undermined in the novels by qualities attributed to its messengers. Zola's revolutionaries share not only a dissatisfaction with the current political situation but also an unsuitability for genuine political leadership and they are presented as unlikely pioneers of the social and economic change for which they stand.

The chapter is divided into three parts - the first will identify the revolutionary characters as a whole in the cycle of novels, in the second section, the patterns of personality and physical characteristics shared by the main revolutionary individuals will be presented. The principal objective is to identify the revolutionary type in the novels, just as we attempted to define the typical representative of the legal system in the previous chapter. The third part of the chapter will assess their revolutionary platforms, and the extent to which justice is central to their claims - and examine what the revolutionaries understand by justice.

Revolutionary characters

A few words should be said about the essential criterion for qualification as a revolutionary character. The adoption of a position, whether or not supported by a reasoned political platform or any practical action, of opposition to the prevailing social order, would seem the obvious requirement. On this definition, however, the political salon of Pierre and Félicité Rougon probably qualifies,¹ as does that of M. Jules in *Ventre*.² The issue of labelling is perhaps less important - the word 'revolutionary' is used by some characters interchangeably with troublemaker, and with individuals such as Eugène Rougon happy to use the term of himself, it is not a reliable guide.³ Whilst acknowledging the considerable range of characters in the

¹ The Rougons' political salon progresses from the yellow and tatty in *Fortune* to a more sumptuous green space by the time of *Conquête*. Whereas the principal revolutionary movements in the cycle can be characterised as republican in their aims, these groupings around the Rougon family in Plassans represent the anti-republican, conservative political viewpoint. As we saw in the previous chapter, Plassans is converted from legitimism to bonapartism by the abbé Faujas. It is surely valid to view these characters as revolutionary in their own way. The Second Empire itself could be viewed as the natural progression of resistance to other forms of government which followed the fall of the monarchy after the Restoration.

² M. Jules' salon meets in another Parisian café not far from M. Lebigre's establishment. 'La bande était très réactionnaire, très mondaine. M. Jules lisait les journaux aimables. Il connaissait le personnel des petits théâtres, tutoyait les célébrités du jour, savait la chute ou le succès de la pièce jouée la veille. Mais il avait un faible pour la politique. Son idéal était Morny, comme il le nommait tout court. Il lisait les séances du Corps législatif, en riant d'aise aux moindres mots de Morny. C'était Morny qui se moquait de ces gueux de républicains! Et il partait de là pour dire que la crapule seule détestait l'empereur, parce que l'empereur voulait le plaisir de tous les gens comme il faut' (*Ventre* 850).

³ In the closing scenes of *Excellence*, both members of the opposition and Rougon himself accept the label of 'révolutionnaire' - each giving it their own spin. The republicans' definition is as follows: "Où, nous sommes des révolutionnaires, si vous entendez par là des hommes de progrès, décidés à conquérir la liberté! Refusez la liberté au peuple, un jour le peuple la reprendra" (*Excellence* 361). Rougon, ever the consummate politician, lumbers to his feet. He appropriates the label of revolutionary

cycle of novels who could qualify as revolutionaries, we are restricting our examination to the four most detailed examples.

The four principal revolutionaries in the cycle are nevertheless a motley crew. In *Fortune*, Silvère Mouret is a callow youth, whose confused readings of an eclectic series of texts fire him with revolutionary fervour. Florent, a former teacher on the run from the imperial police, is a more intelligent dreamer whose impotent resistance to the Second Empire in *Ventre* was mentioned in Chapter Three. Perhaps the most famous of Zola's revolutionaries is Etienne Lantier from *Germinal* who leads the strike of the miners at the Montsou collieries. One of the lesser known characters in the cycle is Sigismond, brother of the usurer Busch, who presents his socialist credentials in *Argent*. The example of Souvarine, the rabbit-loving Russian nihilist who practises the anarchic philosophy he preaches in *Germinal*, shall be used as a point of comparison.

The characters who resist the prevailing regime in the novels fall into two main groups - the 'doers' and the 'talkers', the difference between them being the passage to action.⁴ These broad groups could also be viewed as the 'good' and the 'bad' revolutionaries. The terms 'good' and 'bad' should not be considered a judgment on the individual's political objectives, simply how they qualify as a revolutionary character.⁵ The overwhelming majority of revolutionary characters in the novels fall into this latter group, which is also characterised by self-interest rather than wider

as easily as he reinvented himself as defender of the liberal regime after coming to prominence as a hard line supporter of the government during the Empire's authoritarian era. "Nous aussi nous sommes des révolutionnaires, si l'on entend par ce mot des hommes de progrès, décidés à rendre au pays, une à une, toutes les sages libertés ..." (362).

⁴ This distinction is suggested in *Ventre*. When Rose complains to M. Lebigre about the racket emanating from the private snug where the revolutionaries are meeting, his response is a telling one. "'Pas de danger,'" répondait tranquillement M. Lebigre; "ce sont des messieurs qui *causent*" (*Ventre* 749, emphasis mine). Later Florent starts to make detailed notes and plans on paper whilst '[l]es autres parlaient toujours' (751).

⁵ A good and a bad revolutionary could claim to pursue the same objectives. Guy Robert groups the revolutionary characters according to their beliefs. For example he pairs Sigismond with Souvarine as they share 'des doctrines politiques hardiment tournées vers l'avenir', whilst Etienne joins Antoine Macquart, Jésus-Christ and Canon as they share 'idées socialistes ou républicaines'. Florent and Silvère are linked together, sharing as they do the same destiny, as we shall see later. '[L]a Liberté font d'eux les victimes désignées de leur idéal' (*Emile Zola : principes et caractères généraux de son œuvre* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1952) p.119). Alfred C. Proulx links Silvère and Florent for the same reason. 'Silvère (*Fortune*) et Florent (*Ventre*) sont plus ou moins les victimes conscientes de leurs

reaching revolutionary goals. Social class is not a reliable indicator. According to Aimé Guedj, Zola's revolutionaries are drawn from the full spectrum of society, the majority having their origins amongst the working classes and a few from the 'petite-bourgeoisie intellectuelle'.⁶

A good example of a bad revolutionary is Antoine Macquart in *Fortune*, who is characterised by opportunism and self-interest. His aim in espousing republican views is simply to take revenge on Pierre and Félicité Rougon and to set himself up in a life of comfort on an independent income not derived from his own work. For him everything is calculated on a personal level, and his feint at republican resistance in reactionary Plassans is a carefully judged attempt to settle old scores with the legitimate branch of his family.⁷ In spite of his lack of revolutionary credibility, Macquart does represent a real danger. Operating as a contrast to Silvère Mouret, one of the few good revolutionaries in the cycle, Macquart is instrumental in sending the young Silvère off the rails into excessive republican fervour. The deal he cuts with his half-brother Rougon for apparent control of the *mairie* results directly in the death of a number of republican insurgents entrusted into his care.

Macquart can be classified along with the trio of Jésus-Christ (*né* Hyacinthe) Fouan, Canon and Lequeu from *Terre*.⁸ There are particularly close parallels between the two former and Antoine Macquart - all appear to embrace revolutionary causes in the

idéaux' (*Aspects épiques des "Rougon-Macquart" de Zola* (The Hague and Paris: Mouton, 1966), p.102).

⁶ 'Les révolutionnaires de Zola', *CN*, 36 (1968), 123-137 (p.124). 'On ne peut établir de correspondance entre leur origine sociale et les courants idéologiques dont ils se réclament' (*ibid.*).

⁷ In this his situation is reflected by that of Jésus-Christ Fouan in *Terre*. His stated motivation for pursuing a republican policy is to irritate his father and annoy his younger brother, Buteau.

⁸ Guy Robert describes their respective revolutionary platforms as follows: 'Après Jésus-Christ, socialiste humanitaire, après Canon, collectiviste autoritaire à la façon de Guesde, Lequeu proférera les anathèmes de l'anarchie' ("*La Terre*" d'Emile Zola: *étude historique et critique* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1952), p.322). Robert also suggests that Zola does not do Guesde justice: 'Mais des propos que lui avait tenus Guesde, Zola a usé d'une façon assez surprenante en les prêtant dans son roman, les uns à un collectiviste, les autres à un anarchiste' (p.176). In his article on the appearance of Jules Guesde's theories in Zola's work, Robert H. McCormick Jr comments on the characters in *Terre* to whom Guesde's views are attributed. 'Les porte-paroles de ses idées sont la trinité non-illustre de Jésus-Christ, Canon, et Lequeu' ('Zola et les "Notes Guesde"', *CN*, 69 (1995), 181-195, p.188). He continues: 'Ainsi, tout ce qui traite Guesde ou de socialisme se trouve rélégué au niveau de la caricature dans *La Terre*' (p.189). Robert also observes an increasing violence in their claims. 'Les trois discours révolutionnaires jetés successivement par Jésus-Christ, Canon et par Lequeu sont de plus en plus violents et pessimistes: Jésus-Christ croit à la vertu des formules humanitaires de 1848, Canon à celle

belief that it will improve the quality of their own life. In Canon's summary of his proposals, the elements of self-interest and vague promises we referred to earlier are clear: "A chacun la satisfaction complète de ses appétits, pour le moins de travail possible."⁹

Lequeu, the disgruntled schoolmaster, keeps his views more or less to himself. As a government employee, any expression of opposition could compromise his position. Under provocation, however, towards the end of the novel he predicts the dire future for agriculture under the free-market policies of the Second Empire. Another bad revolutionary is Gavard, in *Ventre*, who opposes the government on principle - he has always been in opposition.¹⁰ One of the most dangerous is Chouteau from *Débâcle*, who attempts to arrange a mutiny in the army and who is seen by Jean Macquart nodding with approval at the summary executions during the Commune.¹¹

A few words should be said about the Communards, one of the groups of revolutionary characters in *Les Rougon-Macquart*. The depiction of the movement and its supporters is seen principally in *Débâcle*, and the picture is not a positive one. Roger Ripoll's article highlights Zola's disapproval of the Commune and those involved in it.¹² Brian Nelson identifies a condemnation of violence in Zola's presentation of the Commune.¹³ Ripoll studies Zola's contemporary journalism in

d'un collectivisme autoritaire, Lequeu en est à estimer qu'une destruction totale, dont il prévoit qu'elle est proche, est la condition préalable de tout essai de régénération' (Robert, *Terre*, p.343).

⁹ *Terre* 766. In addition to pointing out that none of the revolutionaries in the novel is connected with working the land, Françoise Naudin-Patriat dismisses their outlook as a 'perspective des jouissances' (*Ténèbres et lumière de l'argent : la représentation de l'ordre social dans "Les Rougon-Macquart"* (Dijon: Université de Dijon, 1981), p.157).

¹⁰ 'Gavard était un homme d'opposition. Il venait de dépasser la cinquantaine, et se vantait d'avoir déjà dit leur fait à quatre gouvernements. [...] La religion de Gavard était d'être le plus désagréable possible au gouvernement' (*Ventre* 661).

¹¹ Henri Guillemin considers Chouteau an irredeemable character: 'Et il sera horrible, sous nos yeux, Chouteau; un pleutre, un mauvais camarade, un être à tous égards répugnant' (*Présentation des "Rougon-Macquart"* (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), p.385).

¹² Ripoll bases his article on both Zola's fictional and non-fictional writing on the subject. 'Une foule effrayante et meurtrière composée d'individus pitoyables, voilà comment Zola se représente les Communards lors des événements de 1871' ('Zola et les Communards', *Europe*, 468-469 (1968), 16-26, p.22). He is no more complimentary about the leadership. 'Au total, dans leur folie, les hommes de la Commune se caractérisent par la médiocrité et l'impuissance; menés par la masse plus qu'ils ne la mènent, ils sont conduits au crime malgré eux' (p.19).

¹³ 'Zola's rejection of the Commune and of revolutionary violence is emphatic' (*Zola and the Bourgeoisie : a study of themes and techniques in "Les Rougon-Macquart"* (London: Macmillan, 1983), p.32). Commenting on its appearance in *Débâcle*, he says that Zola portrays the Commune 'not

which the era is presented as a 'crise de folie collective'.¹⁴ He uses the example of Zola's initial plans to have Etienne Lantier move on from Montsou through the criminal novel (Jacques, a new brother added to the Lantier family, was eventually used in *Bête*) to involvement in the Commune.

L'association ainsi établie, tout naturellement, en dit long : pour le Zola qui prépare *Germinal*, il n'y a pas de différence entre un Communard et un criminel.¹⁵

The one detailed portrait of a Communard is Chouteau. Françoise Naudin-Patriat also points out that the depiction of the inhabitants of Paris during the siege is an unfavourable one - Chouteau flourishes in an unhealthy climate.¹⁶ For Brian Nelson, Chouteau defines Zola's attitude towards the Commune :

This negative account of the Commune is reinforced by the characterisation of Chouteau, the lazy, seditious soldier who, early in the novel, glibly advocates desertion, purveys garbled 'revolutionary' ideas and reappears later as a Communard.¹⁷

Roger Ripoll observes that there is no attempt in the novel to represent a more positive side of the Commune's supporters.¹⁸

Although our focus is on individual characters, it is important to note that they do not operate in a vacuum. They are involved in groups of more or less like-minded people, either as leaders like Etienne and Florent, or as part of the general crowd, as is

as a heroic struggle but as destructive anarchism, a convulsive symptom of national decay and frustrated patriotism' (*ibid.*).

¹⁴ Ripoll, *Europe*, p.22. 'Folie, fièvre, nervosité, plusieurs des mots-clés de l'univers romanesque de Zola lui servent à exprimer sa vision de la Commune' (p.18). 'Pour Zola, les Communards sont des inconscients. Les chefs, fous inoffensifs, ont été poussés au crime par la masse qu'ils avaient déchaînée; les combattants se sont engagés dans la lutte sans savoir pourquoi' (p.22). Ripoll identifies Zola's attitude as one of pity but also lack of comprehension. Françoise Naudin-Patriat also mentions the latter point. 'Malgré toute sa bonne volonté pour comprendre la situation, Emile Zola qui, à l'exemple de nombreux autres bourgeois de son époque, n'en avait pas saisi l'enjeu social, en donne une représentation défavorable' (Naudin-Patriat, p.290).

¹⁵ Ripoll, *Europe*, p.23. The novel itself never reflected these plans to have Etienne first as a 'révolté', then an 'assassin' and a 'futur Communard'.

¹⁶ 'Le contexte, la 'fièvre obsidionale' c'est-à-dire l'énervement dû au siège, avec son cortège d'habitudes néfastes, l'abus de la boisson, la libre expression des désirs sexuels et l'oisiveté, aurait accéléré le processus' (Naudin-Patriat, p.210).

¹⁷ Nelson, *Bourgeoisie*, p.32.

¹⁸ 'En face de Chouteau, il n'y a pas de personnage susceptible d'apporter un équilibre à la représentation que Zola donne des Communards' (Ripoll, *Europe*, p.25).

Silvère's case. Important issues raised by the idea of a group include leadership and the connected notion of personal ambition.¹⁹ The symbiotic relationship between the leader and the led, which we saw in the previous chapter in the case of Eugène Rougon and his 'bande', is also apparent in the revolutionary groups. These themes are particularly well-developed in *Germinal*. Disputes over leadership of the striking miners are seen in the ideological tussle between Etienne and Rasseneur, and the physical conflict between Etienne and Chaval also has implications for Etienne's continued leadership.

Prominent in *Ventre* is the power struggle between Florent and Charvet for leadership of the group.²⁰ In that novel Florent becomes a member, and later leader, of a revolutionary cell which meets every evening in a private room at M. Lebigre's café. It is a heterogeneous group of revolutionary characters which spends much of its time debating the political thrust of their campaign against the Second Empire. Encouraged by a police informant, Logre, the group plans a large protest march against the government, which never eventuates. As we saw in the previous chapter, the local community has kept the police informed of Florent's movements, and he is arrested before any practical revolutionary activity occurs.

The revolutionary type in *Les Rougon-Macquart*

Using the examples of the four main characters who can be described as good revolutionaries, Silvère Mouret, Florent, Etienne Lantier and Sigismond Busch, we shall attempt to define the characteristics, of both physique and personality, attributed to the revolutionary type in the novels. We shall then compare the revolutionary type

¹⁹ As Aimé Guedj points out: 'Etienne a cessé de croire à l'idéal qu'il défendait; il ne lui reste plus qu'à l'exploiter pour son propre compte. [...] C'est ainsi qu'un militant intègre devient un politicien' (CN 36 (1968), p.135).

²⁰ Charvet criticises Florent's lack of political understanding, and questions the received wisdom, spread by Gavard, that Florent is a dangerous threat to the government. "Et il y a longtemps," continua-t-il, "qu'il le serait, coffré, s'il était aussi dangereux qu'il veut le faire croire. [...] Je vous dis que la police, dès le premier jour, a su qu'il était à Paris. Si elle l'a laissé tranquille, c'est qu'elle se moque de lui" (*Ventre* 845). He is proved right. He finds it hard to accept Florent's leadership of the group: 'La pensée qu'il avait régné là, qu'avant l'arrivée de l'autre, il gouvernait le groupe en despote, lui mettait au cœur le cancer d'un roi dépossédé' (847).

as presented in *Les Rougon-Macquart* with the special example of Souvarine, the Russian anarchist in *Germinal*.

Attractive, physically healthy and mentally unbalanced or physically weak and of a nervous disposition, the revolutionaries exhibit a combination of these physical or psychological features. Florent and Sigismond are weedy and puny individuals, and the latter is desperately ill with consumption.²¹ Not that physical size is a necessary indicator of unsuitability for revolutionary activity, as we shall see in the case of Souvarine, but there are Darwinian implications, as we saw in the first chapter.²² Etienne, although in good physical shape, has a genetic predisposition towards alcoholism and violence, which undermines his effectiveness as a revolutionary. Silvère too is physically healthy and attractive, but both he and Florent are somewhat mentally unbalanced.²³ They are given to violent swings of optimism and nervous excitement.²⁴ Gerhard Gerhardt refers to their 'humanitarian knight-errantry' as one aspect of their goodwill.²⁵ Florent is something of a leaf in the wind, at the mercy of his surroundings. The atmosphere in the private snug at Lebigre's fans the flames of his revolutionary ardour, much as the environment in Les Halles serves to set off his 'détraquement lent'.²⁶ Using the terminology of naturalism, Aimé Guedj identifies a

²¹ Florent's thinness, for example, is constantly referred to. In the first chapter we saw how his status as a 'maigre' set the bourgeois 'gras' against him in *Ventre*. As for Sigismond: 'Depuis le dernier automne, il toussait de plus en plus, la phtisie l'envahissait, sans qu'il daignât même s'en apercevoir et se soigner' (*Argent* 42). He scarcely appears in the novel without reference to his ill health, and his lengthy presentations of his socialist manifesto to Saccard and to Mme Caroline trigger coughing attacks. On his second visit, noticing Sigismond's decline, Saccard is 'frappé des progrès que la phtisie avait faits chez ce grand garçon pâle' (282).

²² Guedj suggests that the revolutionaries are Darwinian weaklings. '[T]ous révèlent une certaine spiritualité en conflit avec la matérialité du milieu physique et social. [...] D'où leur inquiétude, leur insatisfaction, leur difficulté d'être. Malgré leur énergie, ce sont des faibles, des victimes désignées de la sélection naturelle ou sociale' (*CN* 36 (1968), p.126).

²³ Silvère is conventionally attractive: 'C'était un garçon à l'air vigoureux, dont la bouche fine et la peau encore délicate annonçaient la jeunesse. Il devait avoir dix-sept ans. Il était beau d'une beauté caractéristique' (*Fortune* 11). Silvère exhibits conflicting emotions and a potential for violence which seems at odds with his gentle nature: 'D'une douceur d'enfant, il eut des haines politiques farouches. Lui qui n'aurait pas écrasé une mouche, il parlait à toute heure de prendre les armes' (140), and he displays a 'sauvagerie pleine de foi naïve et d'ineffable tendresse' (186).

²⁴ Silvère has an 'esprit tendu' (*Fortune* 185) and experiences a 'voluptueux énervement' (186) from his bedtime reading of political tracts. Florent undergoes a 'détraquement lent' (*Ventre* 728) in Les Halles which leads to a 'surexcitation nerveuse' (*ibid.*), is prey to 'angoisses nerveuses' (732), 'malaise nerveux' (733, 866) and 'inquiétudes d'esprit' (745).

²⁵ 'Zola's biological vision of politics: revolutionary figures in *La Fortune des Rougon* and *Le Ventre de Paris*', *Nineteenth Century French Studies*, 2 (1974), 164-180 (p.168).

²⁶ 'Florent, peu à peu, venait davantage, ne quittait plus le cabinet. Il y trouvait un milieu surchauffé, où ses fièvres politiques battaient à l'aise. [...] L'odeur du cabinet, cette odeur liquoreuse, chaude de la

'prédominance des nerfs sur la chair' in the revolutionary characters.²⁷ In the main, these characters are far from the healthy, sturdy, stable stock represented by characters such as Jean Macquart, Octave Mouret and Pascal Rougon, who are marked out for great things in the novels. For Zola, physical appearance and health are loaded details, and much can be inferred about characters who lack physical strength or emotional stability.

All the revolutionary characters share a predisposition to excesses of passion or nervous excitement, sometimes violently expressed. Silvère's enthusiasm, for example, has the tendency to erupt into violence.²⁸ This is seen in his attack on the policeman when, 'devenu farouche' (*Fortune* 156) Silvère shoots Rengade's eye out, and when, during the conflict with the soldiers, he fires madly without aiming.²⁹ Etienne's violence is well documented in *Germinal*.³⁰

Florent's and Sigismond's excesses of passion take an oral or written rather than physical form. The fact that their violence is not expressed physically could perhaps be a reflection of their higher levels of education and civilisation, and the way they see themselves as intellectuals. The explanation might, however, be even more obvious - their physical weakness impedes them from undertaking violent actions. Like their more physical brothers in arms, they nevertheless exhibit a potential for excessive passion and excitement. For example, when developing his plans for the insurrection,

fumée du tabac, le grisait, lui donnait une béatitude particulière, un abandon de lui-même, dont le bercement lui faisait accepter sans difficulté des choses très grosses. [...] A la vérité, il se passait des choses très graves dans le cabinet' (*Ventre* 745-746). Gerhard Gerhardt sees him as a 'bungling and accident-prone character' (p.178), which is perhaps a little severe.

²⁷ CN 36 (1968), p.126. This is not necessarily a bad thing. 'Déséquilibre ou détraquement, il produit les fous et les génies, les êtres malsains et les martyrs. La prédominance des nerfs est un signe à la fois de supériorité et de décadence' (*ibid.*). Guedj contrasts this characteristic of the revolutionaries with that of the populace. 'Le peuple au contraire se caractérise par la prédominance de la chair sur les nerfs. Il y a donc un divorce lourd de conséquence entre le tempérament sanguin du peuple et le tempérament nerveux du révolutionnaire' (p.127).

²⁸ 'Le généreux enfant parlait bien avec fièvre de prendre les armes et de massacrer les ennemis de la République' (*Fortune* 147). Antoine Macquart nurtures this potential for violence, hoping, in vain, to serve his own ambitions by turning Silvère against Pierre Rougon.

²⁹ 'Et cela, toujours, comme un furieux, comme une bête qui ne pense à rien, qui se dépêche de tuer' (*Fortune* 216).

³⁰ Etienne was sacked from his previous job for hitting his boss after a few drinks (*Germinal* 1170) and his relationship with Chaval is marked by violence. There is a fight brewing which the intervention of Catherine averts (1333), and later Etienne pulls a knife on Chaval (1459). The pattern of provocation and jealousy culminates in Etienne's killing of his rival during the flood of the mine

Florent falls prey to exaggerated paranoid fears.³¹ Florent's attitude veers between extremes of violence and love.³²

Each of the four provides a detailed presentation of some characteristic shared to a greater or lesser extent by others in the group of revolutionary characters. In Silvère's case it is his naive enthusiasm and his half-baked self-taught republican notions which we see in both Florent and Etienne. Florent's sweetness and devotion to others, as well as his fear of bloodshed are shared by Silvère. Etienne's intellectual aspirations and passage to action are seen in Silvère and also in Florent, and to some extent they all share in Sigismond's removal from reality.

In *Fortune*, we see how a flood of partially assimilated information combines with Silvère Mouret's already slightly skewed personality to provide a fertile base for ardent republicanism.³³ He becomes involved in the republican uprising against the coup d'état, and is executed during the government's reprisals against its opponents. Silvère's political beliefs are informed by his half understood readings of an eclectic selection of books which he acquired from a local bric-à-brac merchant.³⁴ Zola underlines Silvère's enthusiasm and his essential goodness, characteristics shared by Florent.³⁵ The text also, however, makes very clear the young man's confusion and

(1571). Like his brother, Jacques, Etienne is prey to 'ces besoins de tuer' (1246). We saw the Darwinian nature of this conflict in Chapter One.

³¹ 'Ces crises de terreurs puériles, ces emportements d'homme révolté, aboutissaient toujours à de grandes douceurs, à des besoins d'aimer, qu'il cachait avec une honte d'enfant' (*Ventre* 812-813). The 'puérilité' (861) of his room is referred to below. We shall return to this childishness later in the chapter.

³² Florent's conflicting traits are seen very clearly in the manner in which his room, the girlishness of which was established by the previous inhabitant, Augustine, and which Florent has retained, is set about with revolutionary paraphernalia. It illustrates the contrast between his sweet nature and his over-excited moments of violent fervour. 'La douceur enfantine du lit était toute tachée d'un paquet d'écharpes rouges qui pendaient jusqu'à terre. Sur la cheminée, entre les boîtes dorées et les vieux pots de pommade, des brassards rouges traînaient, avec des paquets de cocardes qui faisaient d'énormes gouttes de sang élargies. [...] La puérilité de la pièce semblait tout effarée de cette décoration révolutionnaire' (*Ventre* 860-861).

³³ 'Dans un pareil esprit, ardent et contenu, les idées républicaines s'exaltèrent naturellement' (*Fortune* 139).

³⁴ '[S]es chers volumes dépareillés, achetés sou à sou dans la boutique d'un fripier du voisinage' (*Fortune* 139). His varied reading material and collection of unusual objects is reminiscent of Lantier's trunk full of oddments in *Assommoir*.

³⁵ 'Cet air grave et mélancolique qu'il respira dès son enfance donna à Silvère une âme forte, où s'amassèrent tous les enthousiasmes' (*Fortune* 137). He has an 'esprit droit' (145).

inability to grasp the fundamentals of any given intellectual material, in spite of his desire to become well-informed.

Les premiers éléments lui manquèrent toujours. Mais il lut tous les volumes dépareillés qui lui tombèrent sous la main, et se composa ainsi un étrange bagage; il avait des données sur une foule de choses, données incomplètes, mal digérées, qu'il ne réussit jamais à classer nettement dans sa tête.³⁶

Like his cousin, Jean Macquart, Silvère struggles with the acquisition of knowledge.³⁷ From a young age he has been obsessed with learning.³⁸ Unlike Jean, however, Silvère perseveres in the task for which he is eminently ill-suited. The text refers to 'ce singulier amour que les demi-savants ont pour les lectures difficiles' (*Fortune* 185) and the danger of this approach to learning and developing a political position is made all too clear:

Il devint ainsi un de ces ouvriers savants qui savent à peine signer leur nom et qui parlent de l'algèbre comme d'une personne de leur connaissance. Rien ne détraque autant un esprit qu'une pareille instruction, faite à bâtons rompus, ne reposant sur aucune base solide. Le plus souvent, ces miettes de science donnent une idée absolument fausse des hautes vérités, et rendent les pauvres d'esprit insupportables de carrure bête. (*Fortune* 138)

In his assessment of the family, Pascal Rougon identifies Silvère as its hero, having already diagnosed a nervous disorder, perhaps hysteria.³⁹ The young man's potential for heroism is referred to elsewhere in the novel.⁴⁰ His autodidacticism is shared by Etienne Lantier, as we shall see below.

³⁶ *Fortune* 137. It is suggested earlier in the novel that his inherent intelligence is never allowed to shine through: 'Ce devait être une nature intelligente noyée au fond de la pesanteur de sa race et de sa classe, un de ces esprits tendres et exquis logés en pleine chair, et qui souffrent de ne pouvoir sortir rayonnants de leur épaisse enveloppe' (12).

³⁷ 'Et il s'enfonça dans l'étude, sans guide, passant des semaines à creuser la tête pour comprendre les choses les plus simples du monde' (*Fortune* 138). Rather than socialising, Silvère prefers to stay at home, keeping an eye on Dide and increasing his knowledge: 'Il préférerait lire, se casser la tête à quelque problème bien simple de géométrie' (139).

³⁸ 'Ce fut de bonne heure un petit homme sérieux, réfléchi, qui rechercha l'instruction avec une sorte d'entêtement' (*Fortune* 137).

³⁹ "La famille est complète," reprit-il. "Elle aura un héros" (*Fortune* 212).

⁴⁰ 'Brave enfant, dont les ignorances étaient devenues des enthousiasmes, cœur d'homme servi par une raison de petit garçon, capable d'abandons comme une femme et de courage comme un héros' (*Fortune* 12). Note how the laudable qualities of enthusiasm and heroism are overlaid with a negative taint - childish reasoning and emotional volatility.

Florent, the anti-hero of *Ventre*, has a respectable revolutionary pedigree, having been arrested during his republican opposition to the coup d'état - we saw in the previous chapter how limited his involvement was - and later deported to Cayenne. Upon his return to Paris, he becomes involved in revolutionary politics, wanting to realise the 'rêve de fraternité universelle' which he has been nurturing for years. Florent is deeply implicated in the group's revolutionary plans, to the extent of investing an inheritance in the purchase of weapons and assorted revolutionary paraphernalia. Due to the widespread practice of police informing in the community, Florent is once again arrested. His trial and second deportation were discussed in the previous chapter.⁴¹

Florent's personality is similar to Silvère's, both of them exhibiting a sweetness and gentleness which seem completely at odds with the revolutionary extremes with which they are associated from time to time. Florent has a generous spirit, sacrificing his legal studies to look after his half-brother Quenu, to whom he is completely devoted.⁴² He is a very soft touch as a surrogate father, putting Quenu's happiness before his own, whatever the cost.⁴³ For example, Florent undertakes private tutoring to fund Quenu's dilettantish training at a range of occupations, each of which requires the purchase of expensive kit.⁴⁴ Florent attends to all the housework, and ensures that his half-brother wants for nothing.⁴⁵

⁴¹ Auguste Dezalay describes Florent's passage through the novel in the following terms: 'Florent, après quelques mois de compromissions peu honorables, et de complots naïfs, à se faire reprendre par la police pour retourner finalement à Cayenne, avec un dossier plus lourd, et un désespoir accru. Sinistre péripétie donc, dans la vie tragique d'un être voué au sacrifice et au malheur, et rejeté comme une victime expiatoire par une société criminelle' (Auguste Dezalay, *L'opéra des "Rougon-Macquart"* : *essai de rythmologie romanesque* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1983), p.198).

⁴² 'A Paris, il ne pouvait plus être question de suivre les cours de l'Ecole de droit. Florent remit à plus tard toute ambition. [...] Dès lors, il eut un enfant. Sa paternité le charmait' (*Ventre* 641).

⁴³ For example, upon his return to Paris, Florent's characteristic lack of self-interest is seen in his refusal to accept his share of the inheritance, which unnerves the resolutely acquisitive Quenu family: 'Le désintéressement, chez lui, était poussé jusqu'à l'oubli de ses besoins, ce n'était plus une vertu, mais une indifférence suprême, un manque absolu de personnalité' (*Ventre* 787).

⁴⁴ 'En deux années, il tenta plus de dix métiers' (*Ventre* 642).

⁴⁵ 'Et pour s'excuser de sa faiblesse, il se disait qu'il n'avait pas pris le cher enfant avec lui dans le but de le contrarier. Ce fut sa règle de conduite, le regarder grandir en joie. Il l'adorait, était ravi de ses rires, goûtant des douceurs infinies à le sentir autour de lui, bien portant, ignorant de tout souci' (*Ventre* 641). 'Florent, qui avait hérité des dévouements de sa mère, gardait Quenu au logis comme une grande fille paresseuse. Il lui évitait jusqu'aux menus soins de l'intérieur; c'était lui qui allait chercher les provisions, qui faisait le ménage et la cuisine' (*ibid.*). Florent even puts money aside for Quenu's future. 'A dix-huit ans, il le traitait encore en demoiselle qu'il faut doter' (642).

Florent's impulse to protect the young Quenu echoes Silvère's self-imposed task of protecting Miette from the opprobrium of the Plassans community born of her father's conviction and deportation for killing a policeman.⁴⁶ There is a great generosity of spirit in Silvère, and Florent invests all his inheritance in his revolutionary project. Of course, in a way, this shows the extent to which the latter is duped by Logre, but it also illustrates his lack of self-interest.⁴⁷ Florent's generosity is also seen in his treatment of his predecessor at the inspectorate, M. Verlaque.⁴⁸ Sigismond's reckless lack of concern for his health is also a form of self-sacrifice - he is selfless in his plans for everyone to enjoy the better quality of life - under a socialist regime - which he shall never experience.⁴⁹

It is consistent with his gentle nature that Florent has a horror of violence and bloodshed. This is seen in the episode recounted by Claude where Florent became unwell witnessing the slaughter of some pigeons.⁵⁰ His fear of blood and his lack of awareness that his revolutionary plans will of necessity involve bloodshed mirror Silvère's own conflict between a peaceable generosity of spirit and an aggressive political belief which is unrealisable without violence. Both characters have a moment of epiphany when they see that the logical result of executing their

⁴⁶ '[I]l aimait Miette, parce que personne ne l'aimait, parce qu'elle menait une existence rude de paria' (*Fortune* 204). As we shall see in the next section, Silvère creates a virtual identification between Miette and his beloved Republic. His devotion towards his grandmother, Dide, is similarly inspired by a generosity towards those who are shunned by others: 'il l'aimait pour lui et pour les autres' (139), and his attentions become more intense when he learns of her scandalous past from Antoine Macquart: 'A partir de ce jour, il entoura sa grand-mère de plus de soins, il eut pour elle de bons sourires et de bons regards de pardon' (141). Silvère is described as 'généreux' (147) which complements his enthusiasm, to which reference is made throughout the novel.

⁴⁷ 'Florent aurait tout donné. [...] Jamais, selon lui, il ne dépenserait son argent pour une cause plus sainte' (*Ventre* 859-860).

⁴⁸ M. Verlaque has to take sick leave (*Ventre* 669) and Florent is appointed as a temporary replacement. Motivated by pity and unequal to the strength and frequency of Mme Verlaque's tearful requests for financial assistance, Florent ends up paying all his salary to the family. '[L]es cent cinquante francs de l'employé passaient entièrement au ménage Verlaque. Le mari l'ignorait sans doute, la femme lui baisait les mains. Cette bonne action était sa grande jouissance; il la cachait comme un plaisir défendu qu'il prenait en égoïste' (734). His financial support of the family includes paying M. Verlaque's funeral expenses: 'Florent dut avancer l'argent du cercueil et du convoi; il donna même le pourboire aux croque-morts. Comme il allait partir, Mme Verlaque le regarda d'un air si navré, qu'il lui laissa vingt francs' (866). As the words 'jouissance', 'plaisir défendu' and 'égoïste' suggest, altruism is never completely devoid of self-interest at some level.

⁴⁹ His work will be his legacy to future generations. 'Il avait hâté sa mort pour ce suprême cadeau à l'humanité souffrante' (*Argent* 394).

⁵⁰ He discusses Florent's arrest with Mme François. "'Un garçon doux comme une fille, que j'ai vu se trouver mal en regardant saigner des pigeons ... Ça m'a fait rire de pitié, quand je l'ai aperçu entre deux gendarmes'" (*Ventre* 893).

revolutionary agenda is bloodshed, and both shy away from this reality. As we shall see later, this lack of awareness is another reflection of the revolutionary characters' apparent inability to develop a more far-reaching strategy for success.

In his work at Les Halles, Florent is easily dominated and manipulated by the women who work there - and becomes a pawn in the power struggle between his sister-in-law Lisa and her rival la Normande.⁵¹ His daily round is like a tour of duty 'en pays ennemi', where his authority is not respected and he has both abuse and rotten produce hurled at him.⁵² When he is arrested Florent 'se laissait prendre comme un mouton'.⁵³ As we shall see in the next section's discussion of the revolutionary platforms of these characters, both Florent and Silvère are gentle dreamers.⁵⁴

Etienne Lantier has a limited education, and, like Silvère, much of his knowledge is self-taught and poorly understood.⁵⁵ He worries about his 'manque d'instruction' (*Germinal* 1328), and the text refers to his 'lectures mal digérées' (1335). Etienne's correspondence with the union activist Pluchart opens up new horizons, and he sends away for books of all sorts 'dont la lecture mal digérée acheva de l'exalter' (1274). Souvarine also lends him various works.

La honte de son ignorance s'en allait, il lui venait un orgueil, depuis qu'il se sentait penser.⁵⁶

⁵¹ 'Les premières semaines que Florent passa au pavillon de la marée furent très pénibles. Il avait trouvé dans les Méhudin une hostilité ouverte qui le mit en lutte avec le marché entier. La belle Normande entendait se venger de la belle Lisa, et le cousin était une victime toute trouvée' (*Ventre* 713-714).

⁵² *Ventre* 717. He attempts to put his teacher training into practice, and to remain calm under pressure, but his dealings are with individuals more fierce than any of his students ever were.

⁵³ *Ventre* 888. One would expect nothing else from someone with a 'tempérament tendre' (812). The second arrest echoes exactly his first. 'Il se laissa prendre comme un mouton, et fut traité en loup' (645).

⁵⁴ For Brian Nelson, the credibility of these two characters suffers as a result of Zola's scepticism about revolutionaries which sees him attribute their political views to aspects of their personality rather than as a coherent part of an intellectual position. 'The republicanism of Silvère (*La Fortune des Rougon*) and Florent (*Le Ventre de Paris*) is seen as a facet of temperament rather than the result of ideological conviction' (Nelson, *Bourgeoisie*, p. 21).

⁵⁵ He also shares the young Silvère's desire to learn: 'Il brûlait de s'instruire' (1342).

⁵⁶ *Germinal* 1275. Not that he has developed a coherent philosophy for himself, as suggested by 'le vague de ses lectures' (*ibid.*). He still suffers from the 'illusions premières de son ignorance' (1254).

In his intellectual pride, Etienne sees himself as a cut above his fellow miners, confirming his earlier impression that his 'instruction plus large' already set him apart.⁵⁷ He moves towards leading the miners' resistance to the new conditions of work imposed by the Company. His influence grows as does his popularity, even though his confusion develops and his confidence wanes as he exposes himself to more and more information.⁵⁸

Etienne's view of himself as a class apart from the miners is also reflected in his ambition to work as a union organiser, rather than at the coal face itself, an objective with intellectual pretensions.⁵⁹ His burgeoning personal ambition and *embourgeoisement* are catalogued in the novel, and are characterised by the progressive sacrifice of his idealism in the pursuit of political power.⁶⁰ When he leaves Montsou, Etienne considers himself well equipped for the next phase of his revolutionary career.

Son éducation était finie, il s'en allait armé, en soldat raisonneur de la révolution.⁶¹

In Aimé Guedj's view, Etienne exerts a dangerous influence:

Avec les meilleures intentions du monde, Etienne pervertit ses camarades. On ne songerait pas à rapprocher Etienne d'Antoine Macquart, et pourtant le rôle qu'il joue est le même. [...] Son histoire est celle d'une lente dégradation. Plus le réel lui résiste, moins il en tient compte. Dans sa fuite en avant il prend ses démissions pour des audaces. La radicalisation de ses idées et ses violences

⁵⁷ *Germinal* 1185. When he is hiding in Jeanlin's underground bolthole, his thoughts return to this issue. 'C'était une sensation de supériorité qui le mettait à part des camarades, une exaltation de sa personne, à mesure qu'il s'instruisait' (1459). Note how it is specifically on the basis of his so-called education which Etienne considers himself superior. Later still: 'Il éprouvait cette répugnance, ce malaise de l'ouvrier sorti de sa classe, affiné par l'étude, travaillé par l'ambition' (1475).

⁵⁸ 'S'il continuait à s'instruire, dévorant tout, le manque de méthode rendait l'assimilation très lente, une telle confusion se produisait, qu'il finissait par savoir des choses qu'il n'avait pas comprises' (*Germinal* 1328).

⁵⁹ 'Ses longues songeries avaient fixé son ambition: en attendant mieux, il aurait voulu être Pluchart, lâcher le travail, travailler uniquement à la politique, mais seul, dans une chambre propre, sous le prétexte que les travaux de tête absorbent la vie entière et demandent beaucoup de calme' (*Germinal* 1460). Sigismond Busch's room answers this description: 'cette chambre perdue, si tranquille' (*Argent* 282).

⁶⁰ As Aimé Guedj observes: 'Différent des autres, Etienne se croit né pour un autre destin. L'espoir de jouer un rôle politique lui tourne la tête. Sans qu'il en prenne conscience, il songe moins à son idéal qu'à son éventuelle carrière. [...] On assiste à la transformation progressive du généreux idéaliste en politicien' (CN 36 (1968) p.134).

⁶¹ *Germinal* 1588. As we shall see, things do not go quite the way that Etienne planned.

verbaux compensent sentimentalement son impuissance objective. Sa religion tourne au fanatisme.⁶²

This progressive retreat from reality into a fantasy world where things go according to their idealised revolutionary plans is also seen in the other characters. Utopianism will be discussed in the final section of this chapter.

Etienne Lantier is the best example of the passage to action - that practical involvement, successful or not, in the movement towards the revolutionary goal - which separates these four characters from the bad revolutionaries. Within the group, however, there are differing degrees of commitment. Etienne organises the miners of Montsou into a coherent and committed force, and leads the strike. Although ultimately unsuccessful, as we know, the strike has significant ramifications for the Second Empire. Florent is also implicated in a detailed planning procedure and in the acquisition of material to facilitate the insurrection hatched in Lebigre's café. During a search of his room, Lisa finds piles of compromising plans, and she unhappily doles out the ever larger sums which Florent draws from his share of the Gradelle inheritance. Silvère has a brief but emotional involvement with the republican insurgents marching through the south of France. His practical commitment, marked by uncharacteristic violence, is to a movement which does not result in the objectives he espoused.⁶³ Sigismond's active contribution is of an intellectual sort - the detailed plans for social reform, endless mathematical calculations of the equitable redistribution of the world's resources.⁶⁴

Etienne can only aspire to be an intellectual of the calibre of Sigismond Busch, who is one of the most highly educated characters in *Les Rougon-Macquart*, having studied

⁶² CN 36 (1968), p.132.

⁶³ It should also be mentioned that the catalyst for Silvère's passage to action is Antoine Macquart. His constant badgering pushes Silvère to act upon his vague notions of peace and justice through social reform and become a more active participant in the republican movement. He initiates his nephew into the secret society of the Montagnards, and encourages Silvère's growing obsession with old Macquart's gun (*Fortune* 148). 'Toutefois, son oncle eut sur sa destinée une influence décisive; il irrita ses nerfs par ses continuelles diatribes; il acheva de lui faire souhaiter âprement la lutte armée, la conquête violente du bonheur universel' (*ibid.*).

⁶⁴ '[E]puisait-il ses jours à étudier cette organisation, modifiant, améliorant sans cesse sur le papier la société de demain, couvrant de chiffres d'immenses pages, basant sur la science l'échafaudage compliqué de l'universel bonheur. Il retirait le capital aux uns pour le répartir entre tous les autres, il remuait les milliards, déplaçait d'un trait de plume la fortune du monde' (*Argent* 42).

at German universities and worked with the great Karl Marx.⁶⁵ He works occasionally as a specialist translator of Russian texts, for which there is not much call in Paris. He devotes his time and energies to the development of a scientific model for a future socialist society. 'C'était une intelligence, ce Sigismond' (*Argent* 41). He is an intellectual in the sense that his grasp of reality is tenuous and he deals exclusively in theories, which are described as 'songes' in the novel. His grasp on life is equally weak, and in the course of *Argent*, Sigismond's consumption grows steadily worse, and finally kills him.

Un vrai sage, exalté dans l'étude, dégagé de la vie matérielle, très doux et très pur. Depuis le dernier automne, il toussait de plus en plus, la phtisie l'envahissait, sans qu'il daignât même s'en apercevoir et se soigner.⁶⁶

In his discussion of intellectual characters in Zola's work, David Baguley identifies a consistent intellectual 'type' in the novels, one of the features of which is an obsessional attitude.⁶⁷ Another is sexual inhibition - we shall see examples of this below - which is presented as a negative characteristic.⁶⁸ Baguley makes an extensive comparison between these male characters and female characters in the novels whose 'raison universelle' is depicted positively in the texts. In the following chapter's examination of the female porte-parole characters we shall see this in much more detail.

Sigismond's removal from reality is underlined in *Argent*. Not only does he live in a garret room high above the world below (and the Stock Exchange across the road), but

⁶⁵ He remains in contact with Marx, and Saccard meets Sigismond the day after a copy of *Das Kapital* arrived. Sigismond was up all night reading and making notes from 'notre Bible' (*Argent* 283), at considerable cost to his fragile health.

⁶⁶ *Argent* 42. Note his detachment from the physical world and material concerns. He is described as 'tellement insoucieux de sa vie matérielle' (41). In the 'très doux' are echoes of Florent and Silvère. In Brian Nelson's opinion, Sigismond's poor health symbolises his impact on the real world: '[H]is feverish and moribund state, and his final death, suggest that, like other revolutionary figures in Zola, he is an ineffectual visionary whose dreams have little meaningful connexion with present reality. [...] It is the bourgeois Saccard rather than the collectivist Sigismond who ultimately reflects the social optimism Zola wished his novel to express' (Nelson, *Bourgeoisie*, p.173).

⁶⁷ He includes Florent and Etienne in this group. 'Loin d'être pour eux une délivrance, la pensée (au sens le plus général du terme) prend constamment un caractère obsessionnel' ('L'anti-intellectualisme de Zola', *CN*, 42 (1971), 119-129, p.122).

⁶⁸ 'Tous ses "intellectuels" ont un trait commun qui est significatif: une inhibition sexuelle' (*CN* 42 (1971) p.123). It represents resistance to the demands of nature, and is seen in the difficult relationships with female characters - Baguley cites Lazare (*Joie*) as a particularly good example of this.

he is unaware of the nature of the business from which his brother earns money to support their household. His lack of concern for his health is complemented by his brother's excessive ministrations. Sigismond sacrifices his health and any of life's pleasures for his work, from which he fully expects future generations to benefit.⁶⁹ In both the physical and the metaphysical sense he is above the realities of daily life.

Il ignorait tout de cet effroyable négoce sur les valeurs déclassées et sur l'achat des créances, il vivait plus haut, dans un songe souverain de justice.⁷⁰

For Aimé Guedj, all Zola's revolutionaries tussle with the metaphysical, which keeps them at one remove from practical reality:

Chez tous les révolutionnaires de Zola, la Révolution est d'abord une inquiétude métaphysique, la poursuite d'une chimère où se complaît leur sensibilité blessée, une exigence morale devant l'injustice du monde, un rêve compensateur de bonheur universel obtenu sans violence, la soif d'absolu d'une religion nouvelle.⁷¹

The unreal world inhabited by these characters is indicated in the texts through the terminology of dream and illusion. Silvère Mouret inhabits a dream world, where he lives in 'plein rêve théorique'.⁷² The word 'rêve' is used elsewhere in connection with him. For example, he lives 'au ciel dans son rêve' (*Fortune* 141), and is unwilling to be reminded of his family's notorious past, preferring 'remonter dans son rêve' (146), which is described as a 'rêve de liberté idéale' (147). Mme Caroline later reflects on Sigismond as 'ce rêveur' (*Argent* 395) who is seeking a 'chimère de

⁶⁹ 'Et il promenait ses longues mains émaciées parmi les notes éparses, et il s'exaltait, dans ce rêve des milliards reconquis, partagés équitablement entre tous, dans cette joie et cette santé qu'il rendait d'un trait de plume à l'humanité souffrante, lui qui ne mangeait plus, qui ne dormait plus, qui achevait de mourir sans besoins, au milieu de la nudité de sa chambre' (*Argent* 286). A similar description of Sigismond's life is given later in the novel, during Mme Caroline's visit to his deathbed: 'cette nudité où il avait vécu, cette pauvreté sans besoins où il se mourait' (393).

⁷⁰ *Argent* 42. Sigismond lives, therefore, 'dans cette chambre nue, sans une autre passion que son rêve, sans un besoin de jouissance à satisfaire, d'une frugalité telle, que son frère devait se fâcher pour qu'il bût du vin et mangeât de la viande' (*ibid.*). It is only on his death bed that he realises exactly what line of business his brother pursues - usury - which runs contrary to all in which Sigismond believes.

⁷¹ *CN* 36 (1968), p.127.

⁷² 'Sa demi-instruction lui faisait voir plus loin que les autres ouvriers, ses aspirations ne s'arrêtaient pas au pain de chaque jour; mais ses naïvetés profondes, son ignorance complète des hommes, le maintenaient en plein rêve théorique, au milieu d'un Eden où régnait l'éternelle justice' (*Fortune* 140).

justice et d'amour'(396). 'Chimère' is also used by Busch of his brother's project (142) which he also views as 'idées folles, impraticables'.⁷³

As we saw earlier, Aimé Guedj identifies the educated middle class as providing a small number of the revolutionary characters in the novels, whereas the majority are like Silvère - motivated and energetic members of the working class with little education. But formal education or lack of it, in itself, does not count for much in terms of practical revolution-mongering.

On ne peut dire que Florent, Maurice et surtout Sigismond, cette 'intelligence', manquent d'instruction. Mais il y a chez eux une ignorance profonde des hommes qui aboutit au même résultat. Ce sont des idéologues, non des savants. [...] Le savant, conscient de la complexité du réel, analyse et se garde de conclure; l'idéologue passe tout de suite à la synthèse; le savant a la modestie de dire ce qui est; l'idéologue la prétention d'annoncer ce qui sera.⁷⁴

Another characteristic shared by the group is their position as outsiders. Our four revolutionary characters are all marginalised - and this before they reveal their revolutionary interests, which usually serve to see them further sidelined from society.⁷⁵ Etienne and Florent belong to that group of characters in *Les Rougon-Macquart* - outsiders who arrive in a specific setting and through whose eyes the reader is introduced to members of a community,⁷⁶ and through whom the author presents information about a particular geographical area or industrial sector - Etienne is our guide to the mining industry, and Florent to the markets at Les Halles.⁷⁷ Silvère lives apart from Plassans society, his association with two of the town's parias, his grandmother Dide and his companion Miette, sets him apart from the rest of his family (he is viewed by Pierre Rougon as a social liability who threatens his aspirations for public office) and the town as a whole. Sigismond lives in splendid

⁷³ *Argent* 142. Guy Robert underlines how socialism usually appears as a fantasy in the novels. 'Son socialisme, assez tardif, reste le plus souvent dans le domaine du rêve et de l'utopie' (Robert, *Emile Zola* p.169).

⁷⁴ CN 36 (1968) pp.128-129. 'D'ailleurs les révolutionnaires n'ont aucune prise sur le monde; la vanité de leur idéal n'a d'égale que leur impuissance objective' (p.129).

⁷⁵ They are dismissed as mad. For example, Saccard listens to Sigismond's views, 'bien qu'il le prît pour un fou' (*Argent* 44). Jean Macquart is of the opinion that his cousin Silvère is 'toqué' (*Fortune* 142). Florent incites antagonism amongst the population of Les Halles, due primarily to his thinness, but also because of his reputation as a revolutionary.

⁷⁶ Another example of this is in *Pot-Bouille*, where the reader meets the occupants of the apartment building at the same time as Octave Mouret does.

⁷⁷ A good example is *Terre*, where Jean Macquart is the 'way in' to the Beauce and its peasantry.

isolation in Paris, interacting infrequently with characters other than his brother, his principal contact with the outside world being his correspondence with Marx.

In his article on outsiders in *Les Rougon-Macquart*, Ronnie Butler identifies the political activist as a sub-group used by the author to express his views on the Second Empire.

[S]ur le plan politique, l'étranger trahissait l'hostilité de Zola pour le Second Empire révolu. Par l'intermédiaire de ses étrangers politisés surtout, Zola faisait le procès d'une société qui, par sa suffisante acceptation des injustices qu'elle perpétuait, devait provoquer des réactions d'une extrême violence.⁷⁸

Other critics, such as Maurice Descotes, argue that Zola's depiction of the representatives of the Second Empire do enough to discredit the regime without the need for recourse to overt opponents of the system. This is certainly the impression which the previous chapter hoped to create.

De toute évidence, ce n'est pas par la bouche des opposants que Zola entend dresser le procès qu'il intente au régime et à celui qui l'incarne. [...] Les partisans de Napoléon III, les bénéficiaires du système y suffirent largement, et de plus éloquente façon.⁷⁹

A further common feature of these revolutionary characters is their sterility and emasculation, which are in stark contrast to the procreative imperative which becomes increasingly highlighted as *Les Rougon-Macquart* approach their conclusion. These are not strong, chaste figures in the tradition of abbé Faujas and Eugène Rougon. Florent is feeble and frightened of women.⁸⁰ Ironically, he is a pawn in the power struggle between Lisa and la Normande, and both the latter and her sister, Claire, fancy him.

⁷⁸ 'L'étranger : personnage des *Rougon-Macquart*', *CN*, 65 (1991), 139-153 (p.153). Examples of disproportionate repression of resistance to the Second Empire were given in the previous chapter.

⁷⁹ *Le personnage de Napoléon III dans "Les Rougon-Macquart"* (Paris: Lettres Modernes, 1970), p.25. We saw in Chapter Three that the representatives of the legal system did not serve to cast a favourable light on the regime they served.

⁸⁰ This is amongst the earliest things we learn about Florent. 'Il était timide; à trente ans, il n'osait regarder en face les visages de femme' (*Ventre* 611). In addition to the 'maigre' vs. 'gras' nature of his struggle in Les Halles, Florent is also forced to cope with a succession of strong female characters, from his sister-in-law Lisa to the women in the fish market. Described as 'ces femelles lâchées' (718), it is against '[l]es ventres et les gorges énormes' (887) that Florent must do battle. Perhaps the apparently natural antipathy between the two groups explains Florent's fears over a sexual relationship with la

Florent ne songeait guère à ces belles filles. Il traitait d'ordinaire les femmes en homme qui n'a point de succès auprès d'elles. Puis, il dépensait en rêve trop de sa virilité.⁸¹

Furthermore, Florent is more comfortable in the company of children than adults - we saw earlier with what devotion he brought up his younger half-brother Quenu.⁸² Sigismond's ascetic existence allows for no personal pleasures - carnal or otherwise.⁸³ Whilst both Silvère and Etienne are involved with women, in neither case is it a mature relationship.⁸⁴ Silvère and Miette share an unconsummated idyll, Etienne's sexual relationship with Catherine starts and ends moments before her death. His earlier liaison with la Mouquette was characterised by one-sided devotion from her. As we saw, Etienne claims that he is willing to sacrifice both drink and women in his quest for justice (*Germinal* 1272), which appears to indicate the low priority he attaches to relationships.

The lack of maturity in their interpersonal relationships is complemented by their general naivety which, as we shall see, extends to their revolutionary objectives. Proofs of this immaturity are accompanied in the novels by explicit references to the characters' childishness. For example, Florent has a childish lack of awareness of the subtext of human interaction. He is completely unaware of how his presence *chez*

Normande : 'Elle lui semblait colossale, très lourde, presque inquiétante, avec sa gorge de géante; il reculait ses coudes aigus, ses épaules sèches, pris de la peur vague d'enfoncer dans cette chair' (738).

⁸¹ *Ventre* 738. Later, Florent worries that the revolutionary protest will fail because of his inadequacy in this regard. He appears to think that his lack of purity might compromise the movement. 'Puis, il s'emporta contre lui-même, à la pensée du mouvement populaire qu'il préparait; il se dit qu'il n'était plus assez pur pour le succès' (867).

⁸² It seems adequate proof of arrested social development. Although uncomfortable with la Normande, Florent enjoys tutoring her son, Muche. 'Sa joie, son rêve secret de dévouement, était de vivre toujours en compagnie d'un être jeune, qui ne grandirait pas, qu'il instruirait sans cesse, dans l'innocence duquel il aimerait les hommes' (*Ventre* 725). He manages to combine his love of teaching with his revolutionary fervour, choosing loaded words for Muche's writing practice, which is later used as proof against Florent : 'Cependant, le commissaire lisait les modèles d'écriture, d'un air sérieux. Les "tyranniquement", les "liberticide", les "anticonstitutionnel", les "révolutionnaire", lui faisaient froncer les sourcils. Lorsqu'il lut la phrase : "Quand l'heure sonnera, le coupable tombera", il donna de petites tapes sur les papiers, en disant : "C'est très grave, très grave." Il remit le paquet à un de ses agents, il s'en alla' (876).

⁸³ Sigismond is 'très doux et très pur' (*Argent* 42).

⁸⁴ Silvère is embarrassed by his cousin Gervaise's sexual adventures. 'Il était aussi intimidé par les vilaines histoires qui couraient sur son compte. Grandi dans une chasteté de cénobite, il la regardait parfois à la dérobée, avec l'étonnement craintif d'un collégien mis en face d'une fille' (*Fortune* 142-143).

Quenu has upset the apple cart of their existence.⁸⁵ Sigismond is childish in appearance 'imberbe' at thirty-five (*Argent* 41), 'ce grand garçon distrait, resté enfant' (41) with eyes to match.⁸⁶ This impression is compounded by the way in which Busch treats his younger brother: 'il souriait indulgemment des théories du révolutionnaire, il lui abandonnait le capital comme un joujou à un gamin, quitte à le lui voir briser.'⁸⁷

As we have seen, there is certainly a sweetness to the revolutionary characters, which is enhanced by their childlike quality, and which invites a sympathetic response.⁸⁸ Aimé Guedj observes that Zola's attitude towards these characters is ambiguous.

L'attitude de Zola à l'égard de tous ces personnages est ambiguë. Il éprouve une certaine tendresse pour leur innocence, une certaine pitié pour leur faiblesse, mais qui ne va pas sans un secret mépris : ces révolutionnaires manquent par trop de virilité.⁸⁹

Most importantly for us, however, is the fundamental naivety of these characters when it comes to envisaging the actual putting into practice of their revolutionary objectives. There is a particularly good series of examples of this in *Germinal* which show Etienne's uncertainty about the practicalities of seizing power.

⁸⁵ 'Cependant, il avait une belle simplicité qui l'empêchait de voir' (*Ventre* 743). As Ronnie Butler remarks: 'Florent se différencie de Claude par son manque de lucidité, par sa perpétuelle innocence. [...] Cette candeur s'étend à sa sexualité. Il faut que Claude lui signifie l'effet d'émascation que lui vaut son idéalisme politique. [...] La naïveté de Florent est sans bornes et infranchissable' (CN 65 (1991) p.147).

⁸⁶ Sigismond is described as being 'aux yeux d'enfant' (*Argent* 282). Philippe Hamon comments on the relationship between the brothers Busch: 'Sigismond [...] est dans une relation d'enfant à mère avec son frère aîné' (*Le Personnel du roman : système des personnages dans "Les Rougon-Macquart"* (Geneva: Droz, 1983), p. 203). Silvère is also youthful in appearance, as one would expect for someone in their late teens: 'certains coins de la physionomie restés vagues et enfantins' (*Fortune* 11).

⁸⁷ *Argent* 41-42. A similar 'toy' image is used during an episode where Sigismond's condition worsens, and Busch, half dead with worry, is highly irritated by his brother's insistence at working on his theories. 'Faire joujou avec ces bêtises-là, il le lui permettait, comme on permet des pantins à un enfant, lorsqu'il était en bonne santé' (142).

⁸⁸ For Angus Wilson, Sigismond Busch is 'one of the most sympathetic characters' in the cycle of novels (*Emile Zola : an introductory study of his novels* (New York: William Morrow, 1952), p.122). Brian Nelson says of the same character: 'Sympathy for Sigismond and his ideas is undoubtedly felt; and it is significant that, in his preparatory notes, Zola ascribed to the free-thinking Mme Caroline "des tendances socialistes"' (Nelson, *Bourgeoisie*, p.173).

⁸⁹ CN 36 (1968), p.126. Discussing Zola's depiction of Etienne Lantier, Henri Guillemin remarks: 'Son Etienne ressemble plus qu'on ne pense au Florent du *Ventre de Paris*, au petit Silvère de *La Fortune des Rougon*. Le romancier les suivait du regard avec douceur, avec tendresse. Mais les réserves dont il a fait preuve quant à leurs "illusions", elles sont là, toujours, distinctes, explicites. Etienne est la proie d'un songe' (Guillemin, *Présentation*, p.253).

[Il] marchait dans un rêve, il assistait à la régénération radicale des peuples, sans que cela dût coûter une vitre cassée ni une goutte de sang. D'ailleurs, les moyens d'exécution demeuraient obscurs, il préférait croire que les choses iraient très bien, car sa tête se perdait, dès qu'il voulait formuler un programme de reconstruction.⁹⁰

They share the belief that a spirit of fraternity will suffice to overcome resistance to their revolutionary objectives. They assume that their victory will be easy, and so exhibit minimal, if not non-existent, forward planning. For example, Etienne wonders about persuading the troops guarding the mines to lay down their bourgeois-protecting arms and support the strikers in the common bond of their lower class origins.⁹¹ Silvère believes that everyone is behind the republican movement.⁹²

As mentioned above, both Florent and Silvère have dreadful moments of realisation that achieving their objectives will necessitate bloodshed, a reality which they attempt to ignore. Silvère trusts that a solution to the bloodshed issue will come from above:

Le généreux enfant parlait bien avec fièvre de prendre les armes et de massacrer les ennemis de la République; mais dès que ces ennemis sortaient du rêve et se personnifiaient dans son oncle Pierre ou dans toute autre personne de sa connaissance, il comptait sur le ciel pour lui éviter l'horreur du sang versé.⁹³

⁹⁰ *Germinal* 1275. When Etienne comes to discuss the matter with the assembled Maheu family, he is no clearer: 'Sur les moyens d'exécution, il se montrait plus vague, mêlant ses lectures, ne craignant pas, devant des ignorants, de se lancer dans des explications où il se perdait lui-même' (1279). He has a 'certitude de triomphe facile' and assumes that 'un baiser universel [...] terminerait le malentendu des classes' (1279). Etienne cannot explain things any more clearly to the sceptical Rasseneur several chapters later: 'Mais cela demeurait vague, il ne savait comment réaliser ce nouveau rêve, empêché encore par les scrupules de sa sensibilité et de sa raison, n'osant risquer les affirmations absolues des sectaires. Il en était simplement à dire qu'il s'agissait de s'emparer du gouvernement, avant tout. Ensuite, on verrait' (1340).

⁹¹ 'Il marchait, en songeant à ces soldats, pris dans le peuple, et qu'on armait contre le peuple. Comme le triomphe de la révolution serait devenu facile, si l'armée s'était brusquement déclarée pour elle! Il suffisait que l'ouvrier, que le paysan, dans les casernes, se souvînt de son origine' (*Germinal* 1464).

⁹² Excited, Silvère points out to Miette the various villages represented in the procession of insurgents: '"Va, nous serons vainqueurs! Le pays entier est avec nous' (*Fortune* 31). This is also the attitude of the insurgents themselves: 'Et leur esprit rude, avec cette naïveté et cette illusion des foules, concevait une victoire facile et certaine' (163). Reference is made later to their 'confiance rayonnante' and 'espoir sans bornes' (210).

⁹³ *Fortune* 147-148.

Like Etienne, Florent imagines that there will be no problem persuading members of the armed forces to join the popular uprising.⁹⁴ This is perfectly in keeping with his belief in easy solutions: 'Il était d'une crédulité d'enfant et d'une confiance de héros' (*Ventre* 845). After noticing Florent on the point of passing out watching Marjolin slaughter pigeons, Claude helps his friend into the fresh air and remarks :

'Mais, mon brave, si vous vous mettez jamais d'une émeute, vous n'oserez pas tirer un coup de pistolet; vous aurez trop peur de tuer quelqu'un.' (*Ventre* 873)

This episode leads Florent to consider the plans for the insurrection on which he has been working. We see how singularly unsuited he is to this sort of activity.

[Il] songeait de nouveau au plan d'attaque, aux bandes armées qui envahiraient le Palais-Bourbon. Dans les Champs-Élysées, le canon gronderait; les grilles seraient brisées; il y aurait du sang sur les marches, des éclaboussures de cervelle contre les colonnes. Ce fut une vision rapide de bataille. Lui, au milieu, très pâle, ne pouvait regarder, se cachait la figure entre les mains. (*Ventre* 873)

Commenting on the dangers of idealism and illusion, Françoise Naudin-Patriat underlines the distance between the revolutionaries' aspirations and reality:

Ces révoltés sont, au demeurant, incapables de commettre la moindre action meurtrière; ce sont des non-violents que seule l'exaspération peut conduire à des initiatives plus violentes (c'est le cas des mineurs); ils apprendront à leurs dépens les risques de la non-violence quand ceux d'en face n'hésitent pas à employer contre eux les méthodes les plus brutales.⁹⁵

The revolutionaries overestimate their own ability to fulfil their objectives. They underestimate not only the means at the disposal of the regime but also the regime's willingness to have recourse to those means in its defence. In the previous chapter we saw clear examples of swift and heavy-handed repression of the regime's opponents. Discussing the republican insurgents in *Fortune*, Françoise Naudin-Patriat indicates the Darwinian angle of this unequal conflict:

⁹⁴ 'Comme on n'aurait sans doute que quelques fusils de chasse, on s'emparerait d'abord des postes, on désarmerait les pompiers, les gardes de Paris, les soldats de la ligne, sans livrer bataille autant que possible, en les invitant à faire cause commune avec le peuple' (*Ventre* 813).

⁹⁵ Naudin-Patriat, p.209.

Ils seront démunis, face aux bourgeois qui font preuve d'un plus grand sens des réalités et qui ont pour eux la force, l'armée, la gendarmerie, la police.⁹⁶

As we shall see later, there is a considerable contrast between these characters and Souvarine, who is aware of the hard truths of what fighting for one's belief entails.

Only Sigismond seems to entertain anything other than a relatively short-sighted, quick-fix attitude to large-scale social reform. His commitment to social change is no less passionate than that of the other revolutionary characters, but he has given more thought to just what is required for the birth of a new social order. He does not skip round the practicalities as Florent and Silvère do, and is aware that a long wait might be required.⁹⁷ He concedes to Saccard that it will not happen during their lifetime:

'[V]ous avez raison, nous ne verrons pas ces choses. Il faut des années, des années. [...] Pourtant, j'ai espéré le triomphe plus prochain, j'aurais tant voulu assister à cette aube de la justice! [...] J'ai fait ma tâche, je laisserai mes notes, dans le cas où je n'aurais pas le temps d'en tirer l'ouvrage complet de reconstruction que j'ai rêvé.'⁹⁸

Sigismond's attempt at constructing a scientific framework for a new social order represents a considerable development on the efforts of his fellow revolutionaries. His coherent, intellectual response to the social situation is an advance on the earlier revolutionaries' failure to see their actions in a broader context. Whilst addressing

⁹⁶ Naudin-Patriat, p.209. The defenders of the social order create an environment which protects the social order, in which 'tous les moyens sont bons pour exterminer les individus menaçant l'ordre : la provocation, la délation, les mensonges volontairement entretenus pour faire croire à la gravité du péril, les effusions de sang' (p.226). She also suggests that once the threat has passed, the intensity of the bourgeois desire to punish the revolutionaries is in direct proportion to the fear they caused the bourgeoisie. Naudin-Patriat claims this is the case both in *Germinal* and in the reprisals against the Communards seen in *Débâcle*. 'A la panique qu'ont suscitée les insurgés succède une répression aveugle et terrible, comme si les vainqueurs cédaient au besoin de se venger des angoisses subies et d'exterminer les vaincus jusqu'au dernier' (211). We saw in the previous chapter how violently and mercilessly the troops pursued the insurgents in *Fortune*.

⁹⁷ He tells Saccard that it is an 'acheminement lent, mais certain, vers le nouvel état social' (*Argent* 44), and admits that he is aware of the difficulties : "Oh! je ne me dissimule pas les grandes difficultés immédiates"(46).

⁹⁸ *Argent* 285. There is a nice ambiguity in 'ouvrage' - it could mean a revolution or a new social order, but it is more likely to be a written document - drawing on his notes, and following Marx's example. He later entrusts his notes to Mme Caroline, lamenting on his deathbed that he has not completed his work (392). Note the similarities in Sigismond's attitude to that of Pascal Rougon - patience in waiting for an evolution to occur, and the preparation of his notes for posterity, on which others may build. A similar contribution to the future happiness of others is seen from Hourdequin in *Terre*, who commits himself to the long haul of improving farming practices. He tells Jean Macquart: "L'avenir est là sûrement, mais avant que vienne l'avenir, nous serons tous crevés. On doit avoir le courage de pâtir pour d'autres" (*Terre* 710).

longer-term issues of social 'reconstruction' and the minutiae of the new order (as the speeches he makes to Saccard and Mme Caroline show, it is a comprehensive proposal) it is nevertheless undermined by its very hypothetical nature. The fact that Sigismond gives shape to his dream world at all - realistic or not as it may be - is in his favour. His scientific efforts prefigure Pascal Rougon's approach to life, medicine and everything.

So, what is the revolutionary 'type' as depicted in *Les Rougon-Macquart*? They are unhealthy - either physically or mentally. Emotionally stunted, they are unable to form mature relationships with those around them, and this childishness is also reflected in the lack of coherent reasoning which they apply to their revolutionary objectives. Lacking a practical sense of either life or what is entailed for the realisation of their revolutionary projects, they remain outsiders in the community which views them with a mixture of distaste, pity and fear. They are confused dreamers and idealists with a negligible grasp on practicalities. Although well-intentioned, and, for the most part, unmotivated by personal gain or self-promotion (though both Etienne and Florent are ambitious for leadership), they are singularly ineffectual in their attempts to bring about a new social order.

This is not to say that their revolutionary endeavours are completely without impact. It should be pointed out that in spite of Etienne's disappointment that the strike did not have the full effect he hoped for, revolutionary action, although ultimately unsuccessful, does take place - there is the strike itself and then the miners' resistance to the forces of law and order dispatched to Montsou. *Germinal* is, however, something of a special case in the revolutionary stakes, the other revolutionaries have less to show for their efforts. Silvère is involved in the march of the republican insurgents in *Fortune*, another doomed enterprise. In *Ventre*, the anti-government march is stopped before it even starts, and Sigismond Busch dies before the dawn of the socialist order he predicted.

To these revolutionaries, Souvarine and his activities in *Germinal* provide a useful point of contrast. There is something in him of each of 'our' revolutionaries - physically unprepossessing, he has Sigismond's intellectualised approach to social

reform, Silvère's passionate commitment to change, and like Florent he is haunted by a woman killed by the order which they oppose.⁹⁹ Etienne's potential for sometimes mindless violence is reflected in the reckless lengths to which Souvarine is willing to go for his beliefs, no matter the danger to himself or to others.

Souvarine's aloof attitude makes him an outsider, a position which is aggravated by his nationality. In his article on foreigners in the cycle of novels, Patrick Pollard assesses the importance of Souvarine's nationality in explaining his revolutionary stance,¹⁰⁰ and also how the character's appearance can have implications for his moral (or amoral) position:

Even the pre-pubescent appearance of Souvarine is not without significance, for arrested physical development is taken as connoting a similar anomaly in the moral sense. An inability to communicate on either a verbal or sexual level is understood to mean (for example, by Lombroso) the absence of a social sense. [...] The notion of odd or asymmetrical behaviour reveals a corresponding lack of coherence in the moral order.¹⁰¹

Some of these remarks are equally true of 'our' revolutionaries. We shall see, however, just how much further than his French counterparts Souvarine is prepared to go for his beliefs.¹⁰² For example, Etienne is not willing to go to the extremes which Souvarine advocates.¹⁰³ Responding to Etienne's query as to how revolution will be brought about, Souvarine alarms his interlocutor:

'Par le feu, par le poison, par le poignard. Le brigand est le vrai héros, le vengeur populaire, le révolutionnaire en action, sans phrases puisées dans les

⁹⁹ Souvarine saw his companion executed (*Germinal* 1525, 1533), and Florent is revisited by the image of a woman killed during the troops' pursuit of the crowds after the coup d'état (*Ventre* 610, 611).

¹⁰⁰ For him, Souvarine is: '[a]nother idealist whose nationality provides part explanation, part justification, and part determinant factor of his personality' ('Foreigners in *Les Rougon-Macquart*', in *Centenary Colloquium*, pp.83-92, p.86).

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p.88.

¹⁰² Whereas Etienne is willing to sacrifice alcohol and women, Souvarine is happy to put his life in the balance, without a thought for publicity. He displays contempt for those who stop short of his level of commitment, looking at Etienne with 'l'écrasant mépris de l'homme prêt à donner sa vie, obscurément, sans même en tirer l'éclat du martyr' (*Germinal* 1340).

¹⁰³ In his study of the political outsiders in the novels, Ronnie Butler identifies Souvarine as the best example. 'Son indifférence envers les besoins matériels et son culte de l'indépendance ne trahissent pas son isolement et sa chasteté volontaires. [...] Souvarine est le révolté souverain, l'ultime expression de l'étranger, prêt à tout sacrifier à un idéal transcendant' (*CN* 65 (1991) p.150).

livres. Il faut qu'une série d'effroyables attentats épouvantent les puissants et réveillent le peuple.¹⁰⁴

The Russian anarchist displays a passage to action which has wide-reaching implications. The disaster engendered by his vandalism on the mine's pump at Montsou has an impact, in terms of bad publicity for the regime and the mining industry, equal with that of the strike. His 'training' in Russia, and his experience have made Souvarine aware of what fighting for one's belief entails. He displays staunch courage of his convictions.¹⁰⁵ The social change envisaged by Souvarine is extreme, and it will be brought about by violent action, not theorising.

'Tous les raisonnements sur l'avenir sont criminels, parce qu'ils empêchent la destruction pure et entravent la marche de la révolution.' (*Germinal* 1343)

He understands that it is the Company which is profiting from the strike - money saved on wages can be set off against losses in a difficult market.¹⁰⁶ Souvarine is convinced that a *tabula rasa* is the only route to social change, and acts decisively on this belief, risking life and limb to tamper with equipment in the mineshaft.¹⁰⁷ He walks away from the mine without a second glance, apparently unperturbed by the knowledge that his actions will lead to the death of a number of miners. For Yelena Matusevich, this is proof not so much of revolutionary credentials, but of insanity. Souvarine is 'fou' and as such more dangerous than the merely unbalanced revolutionary characters we have seen.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁴ *Germinal* 1343. He observes Etienne's development as revolutionary leader with interest, congratulating himself on his influence on Etienne. After Etienne's speech in the woods, Souvarine is 'content des progrès anarchiques de son élève, satisfait du programme, sauf l'article sur l'instruction, un reste de niaiserie sentimentale, car la sainte et salutaire ignorance devait être le bain où se retremperaient les hommes' (*Germinal* 1381).

¹⁰⁵ '[D]ans le roman, ce qu'il montre, c'est qu'il existe une logique révolutionnaire, logique au bout de laquelle Souvarine est seul à aller, logique qui pousse à l'anéantissement du monde à partir du moment où son ordre n'est plus accepté' (Ripoll, *CN* 50 (1976), p.126).

¹⁰⁶ Aimé Guedj identifies Souvarine as a real revolutionary and Etienne as an amateur. 'La grève entre dans les calculs de la régie. C'est l'occasion pour elle de résoudre la crise économique et de briser la résistance des mineurs. Malheureusement Souvarine est le seul à comprendre. [...] Un vrai révolutionnaire aurait déjoué le piège tendu, mais Etienne n'a pas atteint, n'atteindra jamais ce niveau de conscience politique' (*CN* 36 (1968) p.130).

¹⁰⁷ He undertakes his wrecking project 'dans un tranquille mépris de la mort' (*Germinal* 1529), chastising himself when he allows the urge for gratuitous destruction to compromise his clear-headed vandalism.

¹⁰⁸ Comparing Souvarine with Dostoevsky's Chigalev she identifies the following similarity: '[Ils] sont des fanatiques, des fous qui sont prêts à exterminer l'humanité entière plutôt qu'à renoncer à leur rêve' ('Les possédés de Zola et de Dostoïevski', *CN*, 73 (1999), 317-333, p.328).

How is Souvarine a more credible and successful revolutionary than the others, sharing as he does some of their characteristics? In a sense, it is their positive revolutionary attributes which he shares, qualities to which he adds a much more powerful commitment to the cause. He is uninterested in personal recognition or ambition, as evidenced by the anonymity with which he carries out his vandalism on the pump. Unencumbered by squeamishness or sentimentality, Souvarine is in a position to translate into practice that which he has already absorbed intellectually. He does not have a sense of failure when his action does not, of itself, bring about radical social change. This is because he has a sense of perspective which the others, even Sigismond, lack. His view is that his contribution will be one among many, each individual action contributing to the overall goal. In this regard, Souvarine is not unlike Pascal Rougon who, as we shall see in the next chapter, is something of a revolutionary himself.

Revolutionary platforms - a quest for justice and a search for 'bonheur'

As we said at the start of this chapter, the revolutionary characters are the repository of some of the most detailed calls for justice in the novels. We saw this in the earlier chapter on *Germinal* which discussed the miners' and Etienne's demands for justice. We shall now examine what the other revolutionaries mean by justice, and see what motivates their quest for it. In the new social orders of which these characters sketch the barest outlines, justice is a constant feature. In the previous chapter we saw how tenuous was the connection between the legal system and justice in *Les Rougon-Macquart*, and suggested that it was perhaps the close association between the legal system and the regime of the Second Empire which served to deny justice. Can we be hopeful, therefore, that a new social order might deal in justice, given that it is promoted by the revolutionary characters who, by definition, are opposing the incumbent regime?

Whilst the revolutionary characters have different notions of the new social order, there is a common thrust to their proposals, beyond their essential consensus on

justice. Broadly speaking, the revolutionary platforms in the novels can be described as republican or socialist.¹⁰⁹ The sort of justice to which the characters claim to aspire is social, as one can infer from their vague calls for change, centred on notions such as 'liberté' and 'droits du peuple' which are never clearly defined. Also used, particularly by Silvère, is the term 'bonheur', the importance of which we shall see in the next chapter's discussion of the 'but ignoré'. Both Florent and Silvère have a distinct working-class bent to their programmes for reform, and Sigismond's carefully constructed argument for socialism is along the lines developed by his colleague and mentor Karl Marx. The perceived inequalities of the Second Empire seem most clear in relation to property rights and democratic suffrage, and it is in these areas, if any, that the revolutionaries appear to structure their proposals.

One aspect worth mentioning is the religious nature of the terminology used by revolutionary characters, and the air of fanaticism which attaches to Silvère and Florent in particular, both of whom make great efforts to convert friends and relatives to their revolutionary cause.¹¹⁰ For example, Florent persuades Quenu to take part in the sessions at Lebigre's café,¹¹¹ though is unsuccessful at enlisting Claude's involvement.¹¹² We saw in the earlier discussion of *Germinal* how justice became an alternative religion for Etienne and the miners, and this is also apparent in the other novels, although much less marked. As Auguste Dezalay observes, this is a theme which is developed throughout and beyond *Les Rougon-Macquart*:

Le souci de créer "une religion nouvelle" [...] préoccupe déjà Florent, avant d'obséder Etienne Lantier dans *Germinal*, et d'envahir les pensées de l'abbé Froment à la fin de *Lourdes*.¹¹³

¹⁰⁹ Silvère is most closely associated with republicanism, and Florent 'se prétendait socialiste' (*Ventre* 747).

¹¹⁰ Florent has a 'bel aveuglement de fanatique' (*Ventre* 850). Even Sigismond cannot resist explaining his system to Saccard in a compelling manner: 'Un besoin de prosélytisme le lançait' (*Argent* 43).

¹¹¹ '[I]l dut même penser qu'il avait le devoir de le lancer dans la bonne voie' (*Ventre* 751).

¹¹² 'Jamais Florent ne put enrégimenter Claude. Il rêva un instant de lui donner ses idées en politique, d'en faire un disciple qui l'eût aidé dans sa tâche révolutionnaire' (*Ventre* 848). 'Il le catéchisait, lui disait qu'il n'était pas un homme, s'il se montrait si insouciant du bonheur de son pays' (849). The only involvement Claude concedes to have in Florent's plans is: "'Si vous êtes ministre, un jour, je vous donnerai des idées pour les embellissements de Paris.'" Florent dut renoncer à en faire un disciple docile' (850). Note the words 'disciple' and 'catéchisait'. Claude, of course, has his own revolutionary movement to promote - namely modern painting.

¹¹³ Dezalay, *Opéra*, pp.74-75. In an article which discusses the manner in which revolutionary beliefs become a substitute for traditional religion, Philip Walker observes the frequency of such material in

Silvère, for example, equates the Republic with a 'béatitude céleste' (*Fortune* 140) and the dream world of his new social order is an 'Eden' (*ibid.*). His patchy reading has led to him developing 'une généreuse et étrange religion sociale' (185) which expresses itself through a 'mysticisme social' (204). When he meets his cousin Pascal accompanying the insurgents in his medical capacity, Silvère is delighted.

Aussi, en le voyant couvert encore de la poussière de la route, et le croyant acquis à la cause républicaine, le jeune homme montra-t-il une vive joie. Il lui parla des droits du peuple, de sa cause sainte, de son triomphe assuré, avec une emphase juvénile. (*Fortune* 211-212)

Following the coup d'état, Florent tries to unite the different republican groups against the new government.

Il devint un de ces orateurs illuminés qui prêchèrent la révolution comme une religion nouvelle, toute de douceur et de rédemption. (*Ventre* 645)

His background as a deportee and the consequent 'gloire de martyr' (*Ventre* 746) give Florent a certain credibility in Lebigre's café. He has a 'bel aveuglement de fanatique' (850) and spends his share of the Gradelle inheritance on his 'cause [...] sainte' (860). Auguste Dezalay establishes a parallel between Florent and Christ.

Retour à la vie, retour à la mort, c'est entre ces deux extrêmes qu'oscille Florent, trahi, livré comme Jésus, par les siens, vendu avec Gavard, pour une poignée d'or.¹¹⁴

For Brian Nelson, this religious quality is another indication of Zola's attitude towards the revolutionary characters.

The strong element of religious exaltation in the socialism of these revolutionaries was naturally antipathetic to Zola's positivist outlook, and he stresses the reinforcement of their idealism by their haphazard reading in

Zola's novels. 'L'ombre de ces penseurs, dont la doctrine contribuait à ébranler la religion traditionnelle et à établir les fondations de nouveaux credos révolutionnaires, se projette sur nombre de pages de ses romans' ('Zola et la crise religieuse', in *Miscellanées Mitterand*, pp.261-268, p. 263).

¹¹⁴ Dezalay, *Opéra*, p.72. Philippe Hamon comments on the choice of name for the hero of *Germinal*. 'Appeler un héros Etienne (nom d'un saint mort lapidé), le présenter comme le Christ au milieu des disciples, c'est laisser présager un "calvaire" final' (Hamon, *Personnel*, p.51). Henri Mitterand also makes this connection, referring to 'l'échec même de son apostolat, qui le transforme en une sorte de Christ incompris, lapidé par ceux-là mêmes qu'il a voulu sauver' ('*Germinal* et les idéologies', *CN*, 42 (1971), 141-152, p.150).

socialist literature, underlining, for example, Etienne Lantier's autodidact inadequacy.¹¹⁵

Let us now turn our attention to the revolutionary platforms themselves rather than the manner in which they are presented. The new social order proposed by the revolutionary characters we have met in this chapter appears to be republican for some and socialist for most. A redistribution of the world's resources is envisaged as part of the revolutionary agenda. All associate justice with the new order, which would appear to indicate that they view the current regime of the Second Empire as having no scope for justice.

Each character considers his new social order to operate explicitly as an alternative to the incumbent regime. The Republic envisaged by Silvère and Florent, for example, is an obvious alternative to the Second Empire. In addition to his republicanism, Florent has an additional axe to grind. In his view, as we shall see, the regime is ripe for punishment of its excesses and injustices. For Sigismond, disciple of Marx and *Das Kapital*, the current social order is already embarked on the logical progression towards socialism and collectivism.¹¹⁶

Silvère and Florent's revolutionary platforms are associated with the Republic. The former is inspired by the high-sounding terms he encounters in various books and tracts:

Dans le rêve cher aux malheureux du bonheur universel, les mots de liberté, d'égalité, de fraternité, sonnaient à ses oreilles avec ce bruit sonore et sacré des cloches qui fait tomber les fidèles à genoux.¹¹⁷

We have already seen how Silvère is an emotional young man. A good example of this is the identification he makes between his companion, Miette, and the Republic,

¹¹⁵ Nelson, *Bourgeoisie*, p.21. He continues: 'Muddled thinking is thus associated with practical ineptitude : the republican insurgents in *La Fortune des Rougon* blunder into the trap set by the Rougons undeterred by the fact that they have no bullets for their rifles, while the political conspiracy in *Le Ventre de Paris* is treated as sheer farce' (pp.21-22).

¹¹⁶ 'Mais quelle force de logique, quelle abondance victorieuse de preuves, dans la fatale destruction de notre société actuelle, basée sur le système capitaliste! La plaine était rase, on pouvait reconstruire' (*Argent* 283). Sigismond is somewhat ahead of himself, but considers that the era of rampant speculation, from which Saccard has been profiting, is paving the way for the collapse of capitalism.

¹¹⁷ *Fortune* 139. Note the connection made here between republican ideals and 'bonheur'.

seen most clearly when he watches Miette carrying the insurgents' flag.¹¹⁸ Although confused by the half-understood snippets of information derived from his eclectic reading, he is certain in his commitment to 'la grande paix de la République universelle' (*Fortune* 210), vague as the notion appears to be in his mind. In Florent's case, the Republic represents 'bonté', 'vérité' and 'justice', bases upon which he attempts to style a safe republican refuge answering his particular needs.

Voulant échapper aux tentations de méchanceté, il se jeta en pleine bonté idéale, il se créa un refuge de justice et de vérité absolues. Ce fut alors qu'il devint républicain; il entra dans la république comme les filles désespérées entrent au couvent. Et ne trouvant pas une république assez tiède, assez silencieuse, pour endormir ses maux, il s'en créa une.¹¹⁹

We saw that the sort of justice to which Etienne and the miners aspired was, broadly speaking, a social justice founded on an equal distribution of the world's resources.¹²⁰ Two of the other revolutionary characters in *Les Rougon-Macquart* have a similar objective. Florent's proposals include vague 'projets de loi humanitaires' (*Ventre* 645) such as an unfinished project for the equitable supply of fresh food to each part of the city, and a proposal for administrative reform of Les Halles and the tax levying system in operation there.¹²¹ In *Argent*, Sigismond Busch has carefully quantified the proposed redistribution of property demanded by the collectivism which he and Marx see as the basis of the new social order. On several occasions in the novel, therefore, he is seen making calculations:

¹¹⁸ 'Maintenant, il la confondait avec son autre maîtresse adorée, la République' (*Fortune* 36). It is 'sa chère République' (148) which he yearns to discuss and see established.

¹¹⁹ *Ventre* 644. The use of words such as 'pleine', 'idéale' and 'absolues' show the extent of Florent's optimism for the Republic. 'Quand les journées de février ensanglantèrent Paris, il fut navré, il courut les clubs, demandant le rachat de ce sang "par le baiser fraternel des républicains du monde entier"' (645). This gentle optimism he exhibits before his first deportation is not evident upon his return to France, where, in association with the *habitués* of M. Lebigre's establishment, a dramatic, and potentially violent, seizure of power is planned. This ties in to Florent's self-imposed mission of taking revenge on the Second Empire, which is discussed below.

¹²⁰ Henri Guillemin refers to the title of the novel and its significance in this regard. 'Un beau nom, celui de ce mois du calendrier révolutionnaire. Un nom dont le romancier s'empare, et qui, dans sa pensée, évoquera à la fois cette révolution nouvelle qui reste à faire, et la germination de l'équité' (Guillemin, *Présentation*, p.245).

¹²¹ 'Successivement, il ébaucha une réforme absolue du système administratif des Halles, une transformation des octrois en taxes sur les transactions, une répartition nouvelle de l'approvisionnement dans les quartiers pauvres, enfin une loi humanitaire, encore très confuse, qui emmagasinait en commun les arrivages et assurait chaque jour un minimum de provisions à tous les ménages de Paris' (*Ventre* 732).

Il retirait le capital aux uns pour le répartir entre tous les autres, il remuait les milliards, déplaçait d'un trait de plume la fortune du monde.¹²²

We mentioned earlier that the revolutionary characters are the repository of the majority of the references to justice in the novels. It is Silvère who most closely resembles Etienne (and the miners) in the vague demands for a general notion of justice.

[S]es naïvetés profondes, son ignorance complète des hommes, le maintenaient en plein rêve théorique, au milieu d'un Eden où régnait l'éternelle justice. [...] Aveuglé d'enthousiasme, à la fois trop ignorant et trop instruit pour être tolérant, il ne voulut pas compter avec les hommes; il lui fallait un gouvernement idéal d'entière justice et d'entière liberté.¹²³

As the passage above shows, Silvère also appears to believe in a form of higher justice, an 'éternelle justice', to which he refers in relation to his uncle Pierre Rougon, whom Silvère feels will be punished for his resistance to the republican insurgents.¹²⁴ When his uncle Antoine Macquart complains about his having been ripped off by Rougon, Silvère has every confidence in the operation of some form of justice.¹²⁵ Macquart tries to divert Silvère into a more active opposition to the Rougons, but all Silvère utters are 'des appels à la justice éternelle, qui tôt ou tard punirait les méchants'(147).

¹²² *Argent* 42. Even during his frequent bouts of illness, Sigismond does not abandon his work: '[L]e jeune homme, trempé de sueur, dévoré de fièvre, retrouvait un bout de crayon, une marge de journal, se remettait à des calculs, distribuant la richesse selon son rêve de justice, assurant à chacun sa part de bonheur et de vie' (142). This project is referred to later: 'ce rêve des milliards reconquis, partagés équitablement entre tous' (286).

¹²³ *Fortune* 140. Note how Silvère's uncompromising stance is underlined by the use of words such as 'plein', 'éternelle', 'entière' and how he is not 'tolérant'. As we can see, Silvère makes a close connection between justice and liberty, and is equally passionate about them both. 'La liberté fut sa passion, une passion irraisonnée, absolue, dans laquelle il mit toutes les fièvres de son sang' (*ibid.*). He has a 'rêve de liberté idéale' (147).

¹²⁴ When he finds his uncle hiding at Dide's place he tells him: "'Aujourd'hui, la peur vous a poussé ici, parce que vous sentez bien que le jour de la justice est venu'" (158).

¹²⁵ La Maheude has a similar belief, confident that the bourgeoisie will be punished for its resistance to the demands of the working class: "'Bien sûr qu'ils en seraient punis un jour, car tout se paie'" (*Germinal* 1586). References are made to Silvère's 'tels besoins de justice' and his 'idées de justice' (*Fortune* 205). "Ils ont mal agi, ils seront terriblement punis un jour" (144). The republican insurgents also have a belief in justice. In the wake of their rout by the troops, they realise that their dream is over. 'Et ils avaient rêvé une grande guerre, la révolte d'un peuple, la conquête glorieuse du droit! Alors, dans une telle déroute, dans un tel abandon, cette poignée d'hommes pleura sa foi morte, son rêve de justice évanoui' (*Fortune* 213).

Silvère appears to make a connection between the legal system and justice. Whilst the text makes clear that Silvère has no idea about the intricacies of the legal system,¹²⁶ it seems clear that the law is an important part of his belief structure, and thus, in his ideal world, has a role to play in the interests of justice: 'Pour lui, la loi était chose sainte' (*Fortune* 205).

The 'chose sainte' complements other religious terminology used to describe Silvère's revolutionary agenda. As we saw when he met Pascal among the insurgents, Silvère 'lui parla des droits du peuple, de sa cause sainte'.¹²⁷ Unlike Antoine Macquart, Silvère is generous and not motivated by self-interest.¹²⁸ He develops a 'généreuse et étrange religion sociale' (*Fortune* 185) and works out 'des projets de société nouvelle, absurdes de générosité' (186). This suggests the unreal world in which Silvère lives - we have already seen his rather simplistic approach to life - and now his revolutionary ideas appear unrealisable, as indicated by the 'utopie', 'grandiose' and 'impossible' in the passage below.

Il se trouvait prédisposé à l'amour de l'utopie par certaines influences héréditaires; chez lui, les troubles nerveux de sa grand-mère tournaient à l'enthousiasme chronique, à des élans vers tout ce qui était grandiose et impossible. Son enfance solitaire, sa demi-instruction, avaient singulièrement développé les tendances de sa nature.¹²⁹

Whereas Silvère finds inspiration in books, Florent is initially repelled by the violent measures they advocate.¹³⁰ Before his deportation, Florent spends his time imagining peaceful measures designed to transform Paris from a 'ville souffrante' into a 'ville de béatitude' (*Ventre* 645), aspirations which have a strong social focus. Upon his return from Cayenne, however, Florent's revolutionary objectives, whilst retaining their social leaning, become more violent, and serve to satisfy his need to take revenge on the Second Empire for its injustices towards both himself and others.

¹²⁶ 'Silvère, de sa voix grave, lui expliquait le code comme il le comprenait, avec des commentaires étranges qui auraient fait bondir toute la magistrature de Plassans' (*Fortune* 205).

¹²⁷ *Fortune* 212. This is a confirmation of his earlier position on the rights of the dispossessed. 'Chaque acte qui lui parut blesser les intérêts du peuple excita en lui une indignation vengeresse' (140).

¹²⁸ Macquart envisages the new social order in terms of an easy life for himself, characterised by 'mangeailles sans fin' in contrast to Silvère's 'aspirations purement morales' (*Fortune* 140).

¹²⁹ *Fortune* 186. Heredity is offered as a partial explanation for Silvère's attitude. Remember that Zola was very interested in heredity in the early novels of the cycle.

¹³⁰ 'Puis, les livres ne lui parlaient que de révolte, le poussaient à l'orgueil, et c'était d'oubli et de paix dont il se sentait l'impérieux besoin' (*Ventre* 644).

Fatalement, Florent revint à la politique. Il avait trop souffert par elle, pour ne pas en faire l'occupation chère de sa vie. Il fût devenu, sans le milieu et les circonstances, un bon professeur de province, heureux de la paix de sa petite ville. Mais on l'avait traité en loup, il se trouvait maintenant comme marqué par l'exil pour quelque besogne de combat.¹³¹

The term 'combat' and the exclusion of a life of 'paix' underline Florent's change into a political operator and avowed enemy of the Second Empire. His resistance to the regime extends to his unwillingness to accept the post in Les Halles, an official appointment which has to be arranged through the *préfecture*, and which will put him in the employ of the regime he plans to oppose.¹³² As his narrative to the Quenu family shows, it was during his exile that vengeance presented itself to him as a justifiable course of action, given the 'violation de toute justice' which characterised the regime's treatment of the deportees.¹³³ These negative experiences in Cayenne serve as a spur for Florent's revolutionary endeavours, and as a partial explanation of his nervous disposition.

Son malaise nerveux n'était que le réveil des longues songeries de Cayenne, de ses amertumes en face de souffrances imméritées, de ses serments de venger un jour l'humanité traitée à coups de fouet et la justice foulée aux pieds.¹³⁴

Florent's revenge is carried out in the name of justice. He refers to himself as a 'justicier', charging himself with a mission to redress the injustices he and others

¹³¹ *Ventre* 732-733. Note how his motivation is attributed to a combination of his nature and the environment in which he lives. As he considers his position as a 'maigre' in the 'gras' environment of Les Halles, this idea of a struggle ('combat') is repeated. 'Alors, il se sentit les poings serrés, prêt à une lutte, plus irrité par la pensée de son exil qu'il ne l'était en rentrant en France' (733).

¹³² He explains his resistance to Gavard: "'Je ne veux pas de cette place," dit nettement Florent. "Je me suis juré de ne rien accepter de l'Empire. Je crèverais de faim, que je n'entrerais pas à la préfecture"' (*Ventre* 670). He is pushed by Lisa Quenu into taking the position temporarily, and when it comes up for renewal on a permanent basis, he is again forced to confront the issue, wondering whether he can continue 'servant l'Empire, malgré les serments faits tant de fois en exil' (867).

¹³³ 'Chaque jour des vexations nouvelles, un écrasement continu, une violation de toute justice, un mépris de la charité humaine, qui exaspéraient les prisonniers et les brûlaient lentement d'une fièvre de rancune malade. On vivait en bête, avec le fouet éternellement levé sur les épaules. Ces misérables voulaient tuer l'homme ... On ne peut pas oublier, non, ce n'est pas possible. Ces souffrances crieront vengeance un jour' (*Ventre* 687).

¹³⁴ *Ventre* 733. 'La haine le reprit tout entier' (*ibid.*). Note that although there is a personal motivation, Florent envisages his revenge serving 'humanité' as well. 'Haine' is some distance from Florent's apparently natural sweetness.

(‘humanité’) suffered under the regime.¹³⁵ This can be seen clearly in the following passage:

L’idée d’une insurrection, du renversement de l’Empire, à l’aide d’un coup de force, avancée un soir par Logre chez M. Lebigre, avait lentement mûri dans l’esprit ardent de Florent. Il y vit bientôt un devoir, une mission. Ce fut le but enfin trouvé de son évasion de Cayenne et de son retour à Paris. Croyant avoir à venger sa maigreur contre cette ville engraisée, pendant que les défenseurs du droit crevaient la faim en exil, il se fit justicier, il rêva de se dresser, des Halles mêmes, pour écraser ce règne de mangeailles et de soûleries.¹³⁶

We see in this passage how Florent nevertheless connects his personal revenge to a broader social uprising. Revolutionary activity becomes a receptacle for his spare emotional energy (generated by his ‘esprit ardent’) and the vague feeling of obligation to do something which accompanied him back from Cayenne. He now has a ‘but’, a ‘devoir’, a ‘mission’. Florent, the ‘maigre’ is the ‘justicier’, taking on the ‘gras’, which suggests that he views justice as an alternative to Darwinism. Note the association made between the regime and the ‘gras’, established by ‘engraissée’, ‘mangeailles’ and ‘soûleries’, whereas the opponents of the regime ‘crevaient la faim en exil’.¹³⁷ It is also worth underlining that those who opposed the Second Empire are the ‘défenseurs du droit’.

The words ‘insurrection’ and ‘renversement’ indicate large scale upheaval, and the potential for violence is suggested in ‘coup de force’. It is clear from other passages in the novel that the revolutionary group envisages an overthrow of the imperial regime and the substitution of a more populist government. Whilst the general direction is well established, there is not much attention paid to detail, apart from Florent’s careful choreographing of the route of the protest march.¹³⁸ The group

¹³⁵ The word ‘justicier’ is used six times in *Les Rougon-Macquart*, twice in this novel in relation to Florent, once in *Œuvre* and then three times in *Débâcle* to describe Otto Gunther, the Prussian army officer who views the role of his army in France as that of a ‘justicier’ (Etienne Brunet, *Le Vocabulaire de Zola* (Geneva and Paris: Slatkine-Champion, 1985).

¹³⁶ *Ventre* 812. ‘A cette époque, Florent fut parfaitement heureux. Il ne marchait plus à terre, comme soulevé par cette idée intense de se faire le justicier des maux qu’il avait vu souffrir’ (*Ventre* 845).

¹³⁷ Claude identifies most of the Lebigre cabal as ‘maigres’, telling Florent: “Quant à vos amis politiques, ce sont généralement des Maigres” (*Ventre* 806).

¹³⁸ ‘Il s’en occupait très sérieusement, prenant des notes, faisant des plans écrits’ (*Ventre* 751). Florent’s notes are a proof of his commitment to the cause. When Lisa searches Florent’s room she finds the ‘notes très compromettantes’ (812) which are later collected by the police as evidence of the revolutionary plot. Logre, the police informer, is careful to ensure that ‘Florent restait le chef, l’âme du

discusses 'questions d'organisation, questions de but et de moyens, questions de stratégie et de gouvernement futur'.¹³⁹ At no point is victory in doubt, in Florent's 'plan d'organisation' the successful progress of the march is assumed. 'Ensuite, on marcherait droit au Corps législatif, pour aller de là à l'Hôtel de Ville.'¹⁴⁰ With the practicalities apparently taken care of, they can discuss the more interesting issues connected with the new political order : 'Une des questions les plus caressées était celle de la réorganisation du pays, au lendemain de la victoire' (*Ventre* 747).

The 'mouvement' which they plan (or take for granted) is described as 'social' (748), 'populaire' (867) and 'révolutionnaire' (751). There seems, however, to be a development in Florent's mind from fantasy ('rêve') to reality ('mouvement'). From his 'rêve humanitaire' (747), he progresses to admitting the possibility of a 'mouvement révolutionnaire' (751). Of course, it all remains fantasy in the larger picture, but for Florent the die is cast. Social revolution is now the priority of the character who 'se prétendait socialiste' (747) and who addresses the group at Lebigre's in the following terms:

'La révolution politique est faite, voyez-vous; il faut aujourd'hui songer au travailleur, à l'ouvrier; notre mouvement devra être tout social. Et je vous défie bien d'arrêter cette revendication du peuple. Le peuple est las, il veut sa part.'
(*Ventre* 747-748)

Evelyn Cosset has identified 'avoir sa part' as a frequent refrain in the novels, and one associated with justice.

Le désir de justice est explicite dans la revendication exprimée par l'emploi réitéré de l'expression "avoir sa part".¹⁴¹

In addition to justice, there is an obvious class bias to his proposals - he wants to improve the lot of the 'travailleur', the 'ouvrier' and the 'peuple'. The revolutionary characters are inspired by the objectives of the French Revolution - among them social

complot' (844). Given the written evidence of his involvement, Florent is identified by the police as the ring leader, even though he never makes the transition from paper to physical revolutionary action.

¹³⁹ *Ventre* 746. Other items for discussion include 'la question de la prochaine constitution' (755).

¹⁴⁰ *Ventre* 813. This is an example of the naivety of the revolutionary characters which we discussed earlier.

¹⁴¹ 'L'espace de l'utopie : nature et fonction romanesque des utopies dans *Le Ventre de Paris*, *Germinal*, *La Terre* et *L'Argent*', *CN*, 63 (1989), 137-147 (p.141).

and economic justice.¹⁴² A central element of his manifesto for revolution (and justice, remember) appears to be a redistribution of the world's resources - time for the lower classes to have their share.

This is also the view of Sigismond Busch in *Argent*. Whereas Etienne and the miners see justice in undefined terms, for Sigismond justice is defined, to some degree, by its connection with this redistribution of wealth, as we see in his 'songe souverain de justice', where equality will be the basis of the new social order:

L'idée de charité le blessait, le jetait hors de lui : la charité, c'était l'aumône, l'inégalité consacrée par la bonté; et il n'admettait que la justice, les droits de chacun reconquis, posés en immuables principes de la nouvelle organisation sociale.¹⁴³

Sigismond sees justice associated with a fair or equal distribution of rights. As he tells Saccard, labour shall be the determining feature of the new social order : "Il n'y a plus, comme mesure de la valeur, que le travail."¹⁴⁴ This movement towards the 'nouvel état social' (*Argent* 44) requires the destruction of current society: "C'est notre système social tout entier à détruire" (45). Unlike Florent and Silvère who scarcely address the practicalities of developing a new social order, Sigismond does not flinch from the task and is willing to admit to the sceptical Saccard that it is far from easy.

'Nous sommes dans la période transitoire, la période d'agitation. Peut-être y aura-t-il des violences révolutionnaires, elles sont souvent inévitables. Mais les exagérations, les emportements sont passagers ... Oh! je ne me dissimule pas les grandes difficultés immédiates. Tout cet avenir rêvé semble impossible, on n'arrive pas à donner aux gens une idée raisonnable de cette société future, cette société de juste travail, dont les mœurs seront si différentes des nôtres. C'est comme un autre monde dans une autre planète ... Et puis, il faut bien le

¹⁴² 'Les idéaux de justice sociale et économique s'inspirent des droits politiques affirmés par la Révolution,' (Ronnie Butler, 'La Révolution française, point de départ des *Rougon-Macquart*', *CN*, 60 (1986), 89-104, p.104).

¹⁴³ *Argent* 42. Sigismond dreams of the world's resources 'partagés équitablement entre tous' (286). This notion of the futility of charity is an important issue in the novel - pitting Mme Caroline and the extravagantly charitable princesse d'Orviedo against Sigismond and his calls for a real justice. Halina Suwala traces the history of this question through Zola's preparatory documents for the novel, and concludes: 'L'opposition entre "le socialiste" et "la dame charitable" doit incarner l'opposition entre "l'idée de justice" et "l'idée de charité"' (*L'ébauche de L'Argent*, in *Miscellanées Mitterand* pp.39-55, p.52).

¹⁴⁴ *Argent* 45. 'Il voulait que le travail de tout homme, mesuré selon ses forces, assurât le contentement de ses appétits' (42). He horrifies Saccard with the following statement: "L'idée de gain n'a plus aucun sens. Les sources de la spéculation, des rentes gagnées sans travail, sont taries" (44).

confesser : la réorganisation n'est pas prête, nous cherchons encore.' (*Argent* 45-46)

Sigismond also appears to accept the possibility of violence as a necessary evil. He does, however, resemble the other revolutionary characters in his confidence of ultimate success, which he links to the justice of the new social order : “‘Mais nous vaincrons, parce que nous sommes la justice’” (*Argent* 46). The following passage sets out some of his proposals for reform.

‘Plus d’argent, et dès lors plus de spéculation, plus de vol, plus de trafics abominables, plus de ces crimes que la cupidité exaspère, les filles épousées pour leur dot, les vieux parents étranglés pour leur héritage, les passants assassinés pour leur bourse! ... Plus de classes hostiles, de patrons et d’ouvriers, de prolétaires et de bourgeois, et dès lors plus de lois restrictives ni de tribunaux, de force armée gardant l’unique accaparement des uns contre la faim enragée des autres!’¹⁴⁵

Significantly, Sigismond does not connect justice to the legal system as it stands. He clearly envisages a radical reform of the legal system, which has been tainted by the accumulated evils of money and corruption. While it is open to interpretation that it is solely the ‘lois restrictives’ he wants abolished, leaving open the possibility of other, more fair laws remaining in place, the tone of the statement suggests a much more dramatic shake-up.

An important point in favour of the changes which Sigismond envisages is their evolutionary nature.¹⁴⁶ This is reflected in the time scale he predicts : “‘Il faut des années, des années’” (*Argent* 285), which contrasts with Florent and Silvère’s quick-fix solutions. We shall look at this in more detail later. A further element of credibility which appears to set Sigismond’s socialist collectivism apart from the vague proposals of Florent and Silvère is its apparently logical and scientific basis. This is seen in Sigismond’s description of *Das Kapital* to Saccard:

¹⁴⁵ *Argent* 392-393. The idea of classlessness is also suggested by ‘l’idéale équité’ and ‘pas de privilégiés’ (393).

¹⁴⁶ In response to Saccard’s light-hearted suggestion that what Marx envisages in *Das Kapital* is a ‘coup de balai’, Sigismond replies : “‘En théorie, parfaitement! [...] Tout ce que je vous ai expliqué un jour, toute la marche de l’évolution est là. Reste à l’exécuter en fait ...’” (*Argent* 283).

‘Mais quelle force de logique, quelle abondance victorieuse de preuves, dans la fatale destruction de notre société actuelle, basée sur le système capitaliste! La plaine était rase, on pouvait reconstruire.’¹⁴⁷

The reconstruction of society centres on the abolition of money as currency.¹⁴⁸ For Sigismond there is a precedent for this radical transformation, money itself replaced land as the measure of wealth. Sigismond explicitly associates the new social order with justice.

‘Tout est prévu, tout est résolu, c’est enfin la souveraine justice, l’absolu bonheur. Elle est là, sur le papier, mathématique, définitive.’ (*Argent* 286)

‘Bonheur’ is a loaded term in *Les Rougon-Macquart*, associated as it is with the key concept of the ‘but ignoré’, which is the focus of the next chapter. Justice and ‘bonheur’ are linked together in Sigismond’s revolutionary proposals. His objective is a ‘cité de justice et de bonheur.’¹⁴⁹ The mathematical and logical way in which Sigismond worked out the redistribution of the world’s resources was mentioned above. For him ‘bonheur’ is equally open to scientific calculation, and he factors it in to his efforts to arrange the new ‘organisation sociale’.

[E]puisait-il ses jours à étudier cette organisation, modifiant, améliorant sans cesse sur le papier la société de demain, couvrant de chiffres d’immenses pages, basant sur la science l’échafaudage compliqué de l’universel bonheur.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁷ *Argent* 282. During his moribund delirium, Sigismond outlines other characteristics of the new social order. The ‘partage des biens de la terre’ (393) and the use of machines to reduce the hours of work to four a day will have the effect of improving quality of life: “‘Et c’est tout l’homme développé, grandi, jouissant de ses pleins appétits, devenu le vrai maître’” (394).

¹⁴⁸ Sigismond explains to Saccard that “bons de travail” will be substituted for “l’argent monnayé”. “‘Toutes nos crises, toute notre anarchie vient de là ... Il faut tuer, tuer l’argent!’” (*Argent* 284). Private interests will be replaced by collective. His view is that when ‘amour des autres’ has replaced selfishness, it will be the ‘aube de la justice’ (285).

¹⁴⁹ *Argent* 392. On three occasions in the novel, Sigismond makes the explicit connection between ‘justice’ and ‘bonheur’ (142, 286, 392). This remains a constant feature of his vision, unlike his attitude towards a work-based society which seems to be replaced by leisure (albeit of an improving and fulfilling variety) in his final formulation of the new order.

¹⁵⁰ *Argent* 42. Sigismond’s ambition for his ‘prochaine rénovation sociale’ is that it ‘devait assurer le bonheur des pauvres et des humbles’ (41). He calculates each individual’s portion: ‘[II] se remettait à des calculs, distribuant la richesse selon son rêve de justice, assurant à chacun sa part de bonheur et de vie’ (142).

He is satisfied that he has managed to work it out, as he tells Mme Caroline:

‘Tout y est prévu, résolu, c’est toute la justice et tout le bonheur possibles.’¹⁵¹

We saw earlier how Sigismond is willing to acknowledge that the new social order may be some time in coming. Silvère is less patient, and wants to impose ‘bonheur’ on his fellow citizens, by force if necessary.¹⁵² His excessive enthusiasm and the fact that he is ‘à la fois trop ignorant et trop instruit pour être tolérant’ (*Fortune* 140) mean that his fall-back position, should the perfect Republic not come to pass immediately, is extreme:

[I]l fit un autre rêve, celui de contraindre les hommes à être heureux, même par la force. (*Fortune* 140)

It is this passionate attitude which makes him susceptible to Antoine Macquart’s attempts to whip up his enthusiasm for republican ideals, even if, as we saw earlier, the uncle is unable to launch his nephew against the Rougon family. Also important to notice is how the ‘bonheur’ envisaged by Silvère and Sigismond borders on utopia.¹⁵³ We saw earlier how Silvère’s republicanism is all mixed up in his feelings for Miette. He attempts to implicate her in his revolutionary ideals:

[I]l se plut surtout à s’enfermer avec elle dans les utopies humanitaires que de grands esprits, affolés par la chimère du bonheur universel, ont rêvées de nos jours.¹⁵⁴

Sigismond seems to envisage that socialism will bring about a utopian society. This will be facilitated by, inter alia, the change to work patterns engendered by the

¹⁵¹ *Argent* 392. “‘Ah! n’est-ce pas l’idéale équité, la souveraine sagesse, pas de privilégiés, pas de misérables, chacun faisant son bonheur par son effort, la moyenne du bonheur humain!’” (393).

¹⁵² In this Silvère is like Canon (*Terre*), who is discredited along with his authoritarian collectivism.

¹⁵³ In *Zola et les mythes* (Paris : Seuil, 1971) Jean Borie identifies the historical essence of *Les Rougon-Macquart* as follows : ‘L’Empire fut une curée, la Révolution est une utopie’ (p.39). Jacques Pelletier comments on this appraisal : ‘[I]l exagère, bien entendu, mais pas tellement’ (‘Zola évangéliste’, *CN*, 48 (1974), 205-214, p.209).

¹⁵⁴ *Fortune* 185. In the notes to the Pléiade edition, Henri Mitterand discusses this passage. ‘Le vocabulaire qu’emploie ici Zola est une illustration de son scepticisme à l’égard des constructions idéales du socialisme utopique’ (*RM I* 1563).

increasing use of machinery which will allow more time for individuals to pursue their personal development.

'[Q]ue de temps on aura pour jouir de la vie! car ce n'est pas une caserne, c'est une cité de liberté et de gaieté, où chacun reste libre de son plaisir, avec tout le temps de satisfaire ses légitimes appétits, la joie d'aimer, d'être beau, d'être intelligent, de prendre sa part de l'inépuisable nature.'¹⁵⁵

Educational reforms will see the citizens intellectually fulfilled to the extent of their capacity. Each will make a contribution to the community commensurate with their abilities: 'Chacun pour tous, selon sa force'.¹⁵⁶ Sigismond describes this new society to Mme Caroline as the ideal order towards which humanity has been moving, a society which, in his deathbed delirium, he sees rise before him:

'Ah! cité active et joyeuse, cité idéale de saine exploitation humaine [...] Ah! cité bienheureuse, cité triomphale vers qui les hommes marchent depuis tant de siècles, cité dont les murs blancs resplendissent, là-bas ... Là-bas, dans le bonheur, dans l'aveuglant soleil...' ¹⁵⁷

These passages give rise to two issues. Firstly they show how utopian projections can assume a political function. As Evelyne Cosset explains:

L'utopie renforce le constat d'échec de la société bourgeoise de son temps qui n'offre d'autre alternative que l'évasion dans l'imaginaire. [...] Evoquer les utopies, c'est témoigner d'un besoin de justice, mais c'est aussi dénoncer les défauts de la société.¹⁵⁸

She discusses the potential of utopian ideals operating as the opium of the dispossessed classes, and identifies the messianic angle associated with them.¹⁵⁹ Her article plots the rise of socialist utopias in the first half of the nineteenth century. In her assessment of those which feature in Zola's fictional work, she does not locate any

¹⁵⁵ *Argent* 393. As we referred to earlier, it appears that 'plaisir' and 'jouissance' are taking the centre stage once given to 'travail' in Sigismond's world view. Note that the freedom is not complete - some authority will evidently determine the legitimacy or otherwise of certain appetites. This seems to parallel the imposition of justice, or the forcing of people to be happy, the very fact of its imposition serves to compromise the ideal itself out of existence.

¹⁵⁶ *Argent* 394. 'Chacun se trouve ainsi arrêté, utilisé, au juste degré de son intelligence, ce qui répartit équitablement les fonctions publiques, d'après les indications mêmes de la nature' (*Argent* 394).

¹⁵⁷ *Argent* 394. Perhaps this prefigures the ideal community established by Luc Froment in *Travail*.

¹⁵⁸ *CN*, 63 (1989), p.147.

¹⁵⁹ 'L'utopie est le réconfort des classes démunies et un palliatif destiné aux déréllections individuelles. L'utopie ne serait-elle alors qu'un opium du prolétariat?' (*ibid.*, p.147). 'La pensée utopique revêt un caractère messianique' (p.138).

hostility or contempt in the author's critical depiction of utopias. Rather, she claims that Zola attempts simply to identify how dangerous the illusions promised by the utopians in *Les Rougon-Macquart* can be.¹⁶⁰ But, most importantly for us, she also suggests a relationship between utopia, 'bonheur' and justice:

La quête du bonheur pour tous est indissociable d'une recherche de la justice, mais celle-ci ne peut s'installer durablement sans un changement social radical; le collectivisme et ses implications apparaissent comme la seule issue acceptable.¹⁶¹

This leads to the second point. The progression from calls for justice, through plans for 'bonheur' to projections of utopia provides ever more compelling proof of the revolutionary characters' status as dreamers and their ideal society as an unrealisable fantasy. Their effortless move into the pure fantasy of utopia undermines the feasibility of their earlier calls for justice. It would seem that justice of the sort they are seeking is as impossible as controlling the weather, each objective equally tarred with the brush of fantasy. We shall return to this issue below.

The ultimate failure of revolution in *Les Rougon-Macquart*

Taking the four revolutionaries discussed above it is possible to discern a progression from one end of the cycle to the other. From the more emotional and hazy endeavours of Silvère and Florent to the carefully structured and reasoned approach of Sigismond, the revolutionary characters progress not only in their use of written material - and in their understanding of the intellectual problems of the situation - but also in the tempering of their objectives to the prevailing reality. Florent's vague urge towards an equitable allocation of wealth, and the religion of justice espoused by Silvère and Etienne are given form in Sigismond's carefully assessed projected redistribution of the world's resources.

¹⁶⁰ 'Ce futur plein de promesses, à la datation impossible, surgit comme un mythe enchanteur dont Zola se plaît à souligner la grisante mais dangereuse irréalité, en multipliant un vocabulaire de l'illusion' (*ibid.*, p.139). We saw examples of this vocabulary earlier in the chapter.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p.142. Whilst Silvère would approve of collectivism had he any useful idea of it, Souvarine would not be satisfied by anything less than a *tabula rasa*.

Sigismond is far more realistic firstly as to the timetable for change, realising that he himself might not see the dawn of the socialist era. This is not simply because of his poor health, rather it is testament to his awareness that changing society is a process rather than the result of a radical incident. In this attitude he prefigures Pascal Rougon, as we shall see in Chapter Five. Sigismond is also aware that the change to a new social order might well be fraught with violence and suffering, whereas the earlier revolutionaries perceive the changing of the guard to be a speedy and painless operation.

Only Sigismond offers a coherent view for the new social order. His calls for change are more detailed than the vague battlecries of his predecessors, and his account to Saccard of his revolutionary objectives identifies, for example, aspects of the legal system as ripe for necessary change. There is something of the reasonable radical to this character and his revolutionary platforms, and his association with Karl Marx does not detract from his credibility. Sigismond's approach in *Argent* is described as scientific and mathematical, which is one of the greatest accolades Zola affords his characters. In this regard, Sigismond again foreshadows Pascal. In spite of his slide into utopia on his deathbed, Sigismond is the most promising of the revolutionary characters.

In the final analysis, excepting the qualified success described in *Germinal*, all these revolutionary efforts fail, or fail to come to fruition. Two of the four revolutionaries are dead and the other two are deported.¹⁶² What conclusions can we draw from this? *Les Rougon-Macquart* as a whole can be seen as a sustained indictment of the Second Empire, and whilst criticism does not of itself imply that one has a better alternative in mind, this pattern of calls for justice and series of revolutionary proposals (especially those set up in direct opposition to the Second Empire) does suggest that some other possibilities are being examined.

¹⁶² Etienne was also eventually deported, as Pascal tells Clotilde: “‘Etienne Lantier, de retour à Paris après la grève de Montsou, s’était compromis plus tard dans l’insurrection de la Commune, dont il avait défendu les idées avec emportement; on l’avait condamné à mort, puis gracié et déporté, de sorte qu’il se trouvait maintenant à Nouméa”’ (*Pascal* 1017). For Gerhard Gerhards, the respective fates of Silvère and Sigismond reflect their failure as revolutionaries: ‘Zola could hardly have chosen a more ironic comment on their fruitless hallucinations than to have the one die a virgin and the other an unpublished author’ (*NCF*, 2 (1974), p.177).

It is also clear, however, that these characters are disqualified on various grounds from being the pioneers of social change - their physical weediness and lack of grasp on the broader picture in the case of Silvère and Florent prove fatal.¹⁶³ A further aspect of this naivety and absence of foresight is their lack of awareness that their resistance serves the purposes of the regime they hope to oppose. Discussing *Ventre Aimé* Guedj observes:

J'ai dit qu'on pouvait sourire des tentatives puériles de Florent et de ses amis pour renverser le pouvoir de la bourgeoisie. Et pourtant aucune activité pseudo-révolutionnaire n'est innocente. Le complot dérisoire sert les intérêts du gouvernement.¹⁶⁴

As we established in Chapter Three, no matter how farcical or innocuous the challenge, the government represses all opposition brutally, in a show of strength which meets with favour from their conservative, law-and-order electorate. In spite of their good intentions and fundamentally laudable objectives - challenging the Second Empire and attempting to inject some justice into a new social order - these characters unwittingly perpetuate the injustices of the incumbent regime.

Even if they had succeeded with their schemes for wide-scale political reform, the revolutionaries would have found themselves faced with the problem to which we alluded at the end of the previous chapter. Their new, just social orders would have come into being in precisely the same way as the regime they replaced, with the very lack of legitimacy for which they criticised the Second Empire. They would have sought to *impose* justice, which goes against its very nature. All that the revolutionaries could have achieved was the substitution of one imposed system for another.

The relationship between the legal system and the political regime which institutes it, and by which the regime itself is instituted, in a constitutional fiction, was mentioned

¹⁶³ Françoise Naudin-Patriat considers that being out of touch with reality was perceived by Zola as fatal for the revolutionary characters. 'Ainsi les portraits des intellectuels insurgés (qu'il s'agisse de l'autodidacte Silvère ou de Florent) traduisent la méfiance de l'écrivain pour les idéologies qui lui paraissent privées de tout contact avec les réalités. Silvère, Florent, pèchent par excès d'idéalisme; leur action, privée du contact indispensable avec la réalité, avec la vie, échoue' (Naudin-Patriat, p.291).

¹⁶⁴ CN 36 (1968), p.131.

in the last chapter. The republican insurgents in *Fortune* certainly see the coup d'état as an affront to the law.¹⁶⁵ This raises an interesting point which Françoise Naudin-Patriat summarises as follows:

Ils ne doutent pas un seul instant que le droit entendu au sens de justice soit de leur côté : ceux d'en face défendent peut-être une situation qui bénéficie d'une apparente légalité (ils représentent le Pouvoir établi), mais qui ne saurait être légitime puisqu'elle repose sur la contrainte, l'oppression et l'injustice. [...] Les faces à faces entre partisans de l'ordre et rebelles mettent l'accent sur la rupture entre la légitimité et la légalité d'une action, les deux termes ne coïncidant pas toujours.¹⁶⁶

Reformers are always going to promise justice and never deliver it without imposing their particular version of it on society. They might claim a relationship between their legal system and justice, and certainly their legal system will exhibit what they are happy to call justice. As we saw in the previous chapter, their understanding of what is meant by justice will reflect their own agenda and prejudices. Implicit in the passage from Naudin-Patriat appears to be the incompatibility of justice and a legal system. What passes for justice will be tarnished by those who define and enforce it. Scrutinise any claim to justice made in the novels by the revolutionary characters or the representatives of the legal system and their slant on the concept will be apparent.

That slant, however, will not necessarily be bad. Whereas the Second Empire's focus on the preservation of its order and authority seems some distance from any generally understood notion of justice, the redistribution of the world's resources envisaged by Sigismond and Florent, for example, comes closer. The revolutionaries' alternative social justice seems more just in its insistence on fair shares and 'bonheur' for everyone rather than jobs for the boys and oppression of the majority of the population.

¹⁶⁵ They tell the mayor: "Votre devoir, comme fonctionnaire, est de faire respecter la loi fondamentale du pays, la Constitution, qui vient d'être outrageusement violée. [...] Vous n'êtes plus [...] que le fonctionnaire d'un fonctionnaire déchu; nous venons vous casser de vos fonctions" (*Fortune* 154).

¹⁶⁶ Naudin-Patriat, p.207. The relationship between 'droit' and 'justice' was made by Florent, for example, in his naming the opponents of the Second Empire deported to Cayenne as the 'défenseurs du droit' (*Ventre* 812).

Let us turn our attention from their aims towards the means to which this group of characters plan recourse, for it is here that a more fundamental resistance to our revolutionary characters becomes apparent. For Aimé Guedj, the revolutionary characters are as bad as each other, whether talkers, doers, sweet or selfish.

L'opposition manichéenne des 'bons' et des 'mauvais' révolutionnaires, si fréquente dans le cycle des Rougon, n'est qu'un moment dans la dialectique du type. Silvère et Florent renvoient à Etienne, Etienne à Pluchart, Pluchart à Macquart et Chouteau, figures antithétiques mais complémentaires d'un même destin.¹⁶⁷

The revolutionaries appear to be disqualified by their association with revolution itself. There seems to be ample evidence in the novels to suggest that revolution is an inappropriate method for bringing about change. Time and again reference is made to the cycles of nature, indicating that progress, social and otherwise, should be viewed as a process rather than as an isolated revolutionary incident. The texts indicate that it is evolution rather than revolution which will carry the day. The religious quality with which the revolutionary characters imbue their projects is treated in the same way as are the more traditional faiths, namely compared unfavourably to the creed of progress, where empty words are replaced by the considered application of money and science to the cause.

Not only is revolution discredited as a means of achieving social change, but critics have also identified a class bias in Zola's attitude towards that social change. The provenance of the revolutionary characters in the lower classes appears to count against them. They themselves make the redressing of class issues part of their revolutionary objectives. The class-based aspirations of the revolutionaries are addressed in *Ventre*. Some members of the Lebigre group claim that the working classes must profit from the revolution, as all previous insurrections have favoured the bourgeoisie.¹⁶⁸ Maurice Descotes picks up on this point:

¹⁶⁷ CN 36 (1968), p.135. 'Zola incrimine la soif de l'absolu, l'esprit de système et l'action politique, ces trois composantes de toute conduite révolutionnaire, qui assurent par-delà la diversité des situations et des caractères l'unité fondamentale du type' (*ibid.*).

¹⁶⁸ "Et nous voulons notre part," ajoutait Lacaille, d'un air plus menaçant. "Toutes les révolutions, c'est pour les bourgeois. Il y en a assez, à la fin. A la première, ce sera pour nous" (*Ventre* 748). This idea is reflected in a reference to 'une autre révolution, celle des ouvriers cette fois' (*Germinal* 1256).

Goujet, de *L'Assommoir*, est le prototype de ces ouvriers, sincères républicains pourtant, qui ont refusé de se battre au jour du coup d'Etat. Non pas par sympathie pour le Bonaparte. Mais parce que l'ouvrier a enfin tiré la leçon de l'échec des mouvements insurrectionnels de 1830 et de 1848 : à chaque fois, la bourgeoisie a escamoté à son profit une révolution faite par le peuple.¹⁶⁹

As we saw, Roger Ripoll's analysis of the Communards in the novels identifies a tendency of the author to undermine popular uprisings. Seen as the champion of the working classes thanks to *Assommoir* and *Germinal*, Zola is far more conservative than these works suggest.

Fundamentally bourgeois, Zola seems to suggest in his work as a whole that social change while desirable is not to be entrusted to the populace.¹⁷⁰ This is seen particularly clearly in *Travail* where the ideal society is presented, and it is under the leadership of an enlightened bourgeois that it has been achieved. Brian Nelson addresses this point in some detail in his study of the bourgeoisie in Zola's fiction. He identifies one of Zola's principal interests as social leadership, and his treatment of revolutionary characters is a telling indicator on this point.

Zola's conception of the proletarian social reformer is at once patronising and dismissive : ineffectual or incompetent, his revolutionaries are portrayed as inadequate leaders both of their own class and, potentially, of society.¹⁷¹

On the other hand, bourgeois characters seem to hold the key to social change, as far as Zola is concerned.

Zola sees the ideal bourgeois as a leader and an organiser : his ideal bourgeois is a kind of inspired technocrat seeking to organise and to rationalise rather than to

¹⁶⁹ Descotes, pp.19-20. In the novel Goujet is described as follows : 'Lui, s'occupait de politique, était républicain, sagement, au nom de la justice et du bonheur de tous' (*Assommoir* 475). 'Sagement' could scarcely be used accurately of Silvère or Florent!

¹⁷⁰ Aimé Guedj says of Zola himself : 'Certes on ne nie pas la générosité de l'homme, le courage de ses engagements, mais il apparaît aux yeux de certains comme un bourgeois conservateur que la révolution effraie' (*CN* 36 (1968), p.123). On this subject, Sandy Petrey remarks: 'It would of course be absurd to pretend that Zola was anything like a committed revolutionary or that his nonfictional comments on society are remotely comparable to Marx's writing. As Jean Borie correctly points out, Zola never consciously rejected his class and probably shared many of the prejudices his novels combatted. But it is equally absurd to attempt to depict the author of *Les Rougon-Macquart* as a typical bourgeois reactionary' ('Obscenity and revolution', *Diacritics*, 3 (1973), 22-26, p.26).

¹⁷¹ Nelson, *Bourgeoisie*, p.23. He adds : 'Zola's distrust of proletarian revolutionaries is matched by his distaste for organised bourgeois politics' (*ibid.*). 'Zola was deeply sceptical of mass class action, revolutionary idealists and professional social reformers. He portrays socialists and revolutionaries as either naïve utopian dreamers or cynical opportunists' (21).

bring about violent revolutionary change. [...] Hope is placed in a form of élitist interventionism rather than mass political action.¹⁷²

In this Dorothy Speirs sees evidence of the influence of Fourier. In an article which examines how Fourier's ideas appealed to Zola, discussing the post-*Rougon-Macquart* cycles, she identifies the following trend, equally relevant to the earlier series of novels:

En dernier lieu, la tendance à l'autoritarisme, qui se trahit sous une forme quelconque chez la plupart des penseurs utopiques, n'est point étrangère à l'œuvre de Fourier, ni à l'œuvre de Zola : malgré les intentions fortement démocratiques de celui-ci, ses héros Luc et Jordan, ne s'intègrent jamais à la masse des travailleurs.¹⁷³

The fundamental lack of cohesion within the revolutionary movement is another important factor in the failure of resistance to the regime. The opposition to the Second Empire is not united, it is divided into small units, where egos clash and, fuelled by ambition, leadership becomes an issue. As we saw in *Germinal* the *Internationale* was itself torn apart by petty rivalries. By the time of Florent's arrest the membership of the group meeting at Lebigre's has been reduced to a handful, the others having left through dissatisfaction with Florent's leadership and his proposed reforms.¹⁷⁴

There is general agreement amongst the critics as to Zola's disapproval of violent revolution as a means of bringing about social change. As Brian Nelson writes:

¹⁷² Nelson, *Bourgeoisie*, p.191. 'Throughout his work Zola places no hope in the people as an agent of social change; the masses are seen as guided by their instincts and by irresponsible or inadequate leaders. The crucial point, in other words, is that the inception and success of the new society described in *Travail* is dependent, not on mass working-class action but on the providential intervention of a bourgeois messiah' (p.190). Discussing *Travail*, but on point for our purposes, Nelson observes: 'Zola suggests, however, that collective action by the workers offers no hope of social reform. He stresses the irresponsibility, conservatism and inertia of the workers, who play a negligible part in the social transformation represented by La Crèche' (p.40).

¹⁷³ 'Zola, lecteur de Fourier', in *Miscellanées Mitterand*, pp.57-63 (p.60).

¹⁷⁴ Florent's 'team' is, nevertheless, much less extreme than the other faction. 'Il y avait deux camps. Charvet, qui professait l'hébertisme, avait avec lui Logre et Robine' (*Ventre* 747). In his notes to the Pléiade edition, Henri Mitterand identifies the 'hébertistes' as hardliners. 'Les hébertistes, groupés autour d'Hébert, formaient en 1793-1794 un groupe d'extrémistes partisans des mesures révolutionnaires les plus violentes' (*RM I* 1640).

Although he exposed the abuses of his society, he was highly sceptical of those trying to save society by violent revolution.¹⁷⁵

Several critics agree that the whole question of revolution presented Zola with a real problem. For Jean-Louis Vissière, *Germinal* shows Zola feeling his way towards an opinion on the means for social reform. He shows how Zola appears to assess different theories before assembling his own particular policy.¹⁷⁶

Les conceptions de Zola ne sont d'ailleurs pas nettes; dans *Germinal*, il semble hésiter entre trois types de révolution sociale : l'émeute brutale, action d'une masse aveugle; le terrorisme individuel des anarchistes; l'action collective organisée, le syndicalisme. [...] Zola passe de l'apocalypse à l'évangile et renie finalement la violence de *Germinal*.¹⁷⁷

Aimé Guedj is generous in his explanation of Zola's apparently inconsistent views on revolution: 'Déçu par les révolutions politiques qui s'étaient vainement succédées sans régler aucun problème, il avait de bonnes raisons de croire que la révolution sociale était à la fois nécessaire et impossible' (*CN* 36 (1968), pp.123-124). Aimé Guedj suggests that the notion of revolution lacks scientific support and, as such, Zola's approval:

La pensée de Zola est une pensée de la continuité; dans l'enchaînement indéfini des effets et des causes, il ne peut concevoir de rupture. Son scientisme ne lui permet pas de penser la révolution. C'est un mythe que la science détruit.¹⁷⁸

Rita Schober discerns approval for evolution over revolution:

Dans *Germinal* également, le dernier mot d'Etienne c'est 'l'évolution', la transformation lente et progressive à l'aide de réformes démocratiques. L'image finale de la semence qui germe n'est pas une métaphore choisie par hasard dans la nature, mais un symbole qui résulte logiquement de

¹⁷⁵ Nelson, *Bourgeoisie*, p.192. Angus Wilson's general study of Zola and his works contains a discussion of violence in the novels. He concludes: 'However violent his own inner emotions, physical and external violence, which is a constant feature of his novels, always appears as a symbol of the self-destructive, corrupt elements in life' (Wilson, *Emile Zola*, p.39).

¹⁷⁶ 'Zola avait assimilé les idées sociales et scientifiques vulgarisées par la presse et s'était constitué une doctrine personnelle, plus littéraire que politique, il faut bien le reconnaître. Tout ce que l'on peut dire, à l'heure actuelle, c'est que Zola était un artiste aux écoutes de son époque, doué d'une prodigieuse faculté de synthèse' ('Politique et prophétie dans *Germinal*', *CN*, 20 (1962), 166-167, p.167).

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p.167.

¹⁷⁸ *CN* 36 (1968), pp.136-137.

So, evolution is to be preferred to revolution. Sigismond is right - the advent of a new social order requires a long term commitment. This becomes clearer as *Les Rougon-Macquart* come to an end and as Zola moves into the later cycles:

Il croyait que la société nouvelle serait le fruit d'une lente évolution amenée par le progrès des sciences et le partage par tous des bienfaits de l'éducation; ainsi s'explique dans ses dernières œuvres l'importance de la figure du savant comme seul authentique révolutionnaire.¹⁸⁰

We see this reflected in Pascal Rougon's decision to let nature run its course, and in the serenity he derived 'depuis que je suis respectueux de l'évolution' (*Pascal* 1085). This statement appears to suggest that revolution is the domain and recourse of the less sophisticated, whereas those with sufficient insight will allow the natural process to take place, to let 'la vie' run its course. This commitment to a distant objective, and the change of emphasis from revolution in favour of the evolutionary movement towards the 'but ignoré' is the main focus of the next chapter.

The revolutionaries have the right idea, namely that change is needed in French society, that there is an absence of justice. We saw, however, that the justice promised by the revolutionary characters has not been delivered either. This is unfortunate, as the social justice along the lines of which the revolutionaries were seeking to establish the new order, is a compelling and attractive alternative to what passes for justice under the prevailing regime.

¹⁷⁹ 'Le Docteur Pascal ou le sens de la vie', *CN*, 53 (1979), 53-74, pp.68-69. Schober adds that Zola appears a little confused on the revolution-evolution question: '[D]e toute sa vie Zola n'a pas pu faire le pas qualitatif de la nature à la société, du règne de la nature à celui de l'homme, de l'histoire de la nature à l'histoire de l'homme, ni comprendre la théorie de la dialectique de l'évolution et de la révolution' (p.70). Not all the critics consider that the parallel between the natural and the social, and between the scientific and the political, is a persuasive one. Sandy Petrey, for one, raises an objection, suggesting that the mere fact of '[r]evolution makes it clear that societies don't after all behave like organisms' ('Zola's critical distance', *CN*, 67 (1993), 181-190, p.185).

¹⁸⁰ Jacques Pelletier, 'Lukacs, lecteur de Zola,' *CN*, 41 (1971), 58-74 (p.71). The importance of scientifically competent figures is worth noting. Coming into their own in the later series, we saw a hint in Sigismond, and will see the type incarnated in Pascal Rougon.

Three main reasons were identified behind their failure. The first was the unsuitability of the characters for such a task, one aspect of which was their social class. The second was their ill-thought out revolutionary projects. Although central to their demands for a new world order, the social justice they envisaged was thus something of a non-starter. Would that their heady combination of justice and 'bonheur', derived from the principle of 'chacun sa part', could have been brought about, reflecting as it does a generally accepted notion of justice. The third was the way in which evolution rather than revolution is suggested in the texts as the way towards the new social order.

Not only have we seen how revolution appears to be an unsuitable means of achieving social change, but the revolutionaries also lack The Right Stuff. Zola presents more suitable midwives for ushering in the new era, as we shall see in the next chapter. Unlike the revolutionary characters who were marked, as we have seen, by too much talk and too little action, the female porte-paroles are characterised by action and an absence of empty theorising.

Our hopes for finding justice in *Les Rougon-Macquart* are not completely extinguished, in spite of identifying the absence of justice in the legal system and the impossibility of its delivery through revolution, for the reasons presented above. There is, nevertheless, a clear indication in the texts that some sort of natural cycle is in progress, that there is a momentum already working towards radical social change. This movement is the focus of the next chapter. As we shall see, there are hints that justice is part of the new order.

CHAPTER FIVE

JUSTICE DEFERRED : THE 'BUT IGNORÉ'

We have reached the final chapter of this thesis, and we have not yet discerned a justice which appears worthy of the name. There is still scope for hope, however, in the optimism for a better world order which is shared by a group of privileged characters lead by Pascal Rougon, acknowledged *alter ego* of Zola. Pascal is supported by Denise Baudu (*Bonheur*), Pauline Quenu (*Joie*), Caroline Hamelin (*Argent*) and Clotilde Rougon (*Pascal*), a collection we have called the female porte-parole characters. Unlike the revolutionary characters of the previous chapter, this band of evolutionaries has a distinctly different approach to the establishment of a new world order.

Rather than attempt to set the pace and define the new social order themselves, this group of characters is aware that there is already some movement afoot, a movement which is steadily advancing towards a better world, towards something very similar to the 'bonheur' we have seen demanded by other characters. The final destination of this movement, which they call 'la vie', and which is sometimes referred to as 'progrès' or 'évolution', is designated the 'but ignoré' in the novels, though other terms are also used, as we shall see below. Put simply, these characters sense the movement to be leading them towards this enhanced state of affairs, and they commit themselves to it, with optimism and confidence, and make whatever effort they can to contribute to this inexorable process forward.

In the two previous chapters we established the 'type' of the revolutionary character and the representative of the legal system, and it seems only appropriate to identify the

key attributes of this group of characters whose fundamental honesty and calm confidence enhance their optimism. As we shall see, they are a group of characters into whom Zola apparently put the best of himself, which must count for something.

Pascal and the female porte-parole characters

Standing Janus-like on the threshold between *Les Rougon-Macquart* and the two later series *Les Trois Villes* and *Les Quatre Evangiles*, Pascal occupies an important physical location in Zola's work as befits one of the most privileged characters.¹ His association with science (and medicine) and his philosophical approach to life contribute to his credibility as Zola's porte-parole.² Describing *Pascal* as 'le seul véritable roman à thèse des *Rougon-Macquart*' Henri Mitterand confirms Pascal's special status: 'Pascal Rougon, de tous les personnages auxquels Zola a prêté successivement sa voix, son porte-parole le plus autorisé' (*RM* V 1572).

He is a character whose values and opinions are loaded with significance. In the *ébauche* for the novel Zola identifies Pascal's special role.³ It seems only reasonable to use his insights and comments as a way of tying together the strands of principle and philosophy which appear elsewhere in the cycle.⁴ After all, the scenes where

¹ Pascale Krumm is one of many critics to point this out: 'Au lieu d'être l'épilogue des *Rougon-Macquart*, *Le Docteur Pascal* sert plutôt de prologue au cycle suivant des *Quatre Evangiles*' ('*Le Docteur Pascal* : un (dangereux) supplément? La problématique féminine dans le cycle zolien', *CN*, 73 (1999), 227-240, p.227).

² Critics seem to agree on this point, for example Sven Kellner claims : 'C'est lui qui est le porte-parole des idées de l'auteur notamment sur la religion et la science' (*Emile Zola et son œuvre* (Paris: Les Deux Colombes, 1994), p.68). For Auguste Dezalay 'Pascal n'est d'ailleurs ici que le porte-parole de Zola lui-même, nous le savons, car sa pensée coïncide absolument avec les intuitions, les notations, et les réflexions du romancier au moment de la préparation de l'ensemble des *Rougon-Macquart*' (*L'Opéra des "Rougon-Macquart" : essai de rythmologie romanesque* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1983), p.205). There are several superficial similarities between the two individuals as well - such as their method of work, their May-to-December relationships, their interest in science and new technologies. A comprehensive role is attributed to Pascal Rougon, and there are indications that the final novel in the cycle was to serve as a summary of the nineteen which preceded it. The dedication of the novel appears to confirm this: 'A la mémoire de Ma Mère et à Ma Chère Femme je dédie ce roman qui est le résumé et la conclusion de toute mon œuvre' (*RM* V 915).

³ 'Je voudrais, avec le docteur Pascal, résumer toute la signification philosophique de la série. Je crois y avoir mis, malgré le noir pessimisme qui s'y trouve, un grand amour de la vie, en exaltant continuellement les forces' (*RM* V 1580).

⁴ 'Bref, le docteur Pascal figure le héros naturaliste. Et, conformément à son rôle privilégié, il est destiné à formuler la conclusion scientifique de l'œuvre de Zola, dans le dernier roman de la série : *Le*

Pascal presents the family dossiers to Clotilde is a blatant pretext to revisit and encapsulate the events and characters of the entire cycle of novels.⁵ If there is an 'answer' to be had, then surely Pascal is the most likely to arrive at it.

Pascal is consistently presented in a good light whenever he appears in the novels. One point which is made frequently in connection with Pascal is that he does not fit in with the ambitious and power-hungry Rougons of Plassans, which is seen most clearly in the way he is known as 'Monsieur Pascal', dropping the family name.⁶ His 'besoin de modestie' (*Fortune* 67) means that he is not motivated by a desire for personal wealth and glory. We shall see that this lack of self-interest is shared by the female porte-paroles. For Chantal Bertrand-Jennings, his sacrificial role is also suggested by his name : 'Le nom de Pascal souligne d'ailleurs la mission rédemptrice et sacrificielle du héros.'⁷

Pascal's medical and scientific work is progressive and experimental.⁸ His pioneering research has ensured him a reputation amongst the medical fraternity.⁹ Although his studies range from fruit farming to marine biology, Pascal's principal interest is in genetics. He is also developing a 'panacée universelle', which he hopes will contribute to his ultimate goal of making 'une humanité toute neuve et supérieure' (*Pascal* 949). In this phase of his career he is styled as a 'médecin guérisseur'.

Docteur Pascal (David Baguley, 'Du Naturalisme au mythe : l'alchimie du docteur Pascal', (CN, 48 (1974), 141-163, p.143).

⁵ Henri Guillemin remarks : 'Si Sandoz était lui, ouvertement, dans *L'Œuvre*, avec encore plus de netteté Zola s'identifie au héros de son livre final. Les "dossiers" que le docteur Pascal Rougon a constitués, tout au long de son existence, sur les membres de sa famille, aucun lecteur ne peut s'y tromper; ce sont les tomes de la série qui s'achève' (*Présentation des "Rougon-Macquart"* (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), p.401).

⁶ He is known simply as "M. Pascal" : 'sans jamais ajouter son nom de famille' (*Fortune* 68). Pascal 'se nommait "Monsieur Pascal" tout court' (*Faute* 1246).

⁷ *L'Eros et la Femme chez Zola : de la chute au paradis retrouvé* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1974), p.114. His name 'annonce la vocation rédemptrice' (p.112). Sven Kellner remarks: 'En ce qui concerne le nom de Pascal, il est à remarquer qu'il y a là tout un symbolisme : "Pascal" doit être une référence au Mystère central de la foi chrétienne' ("*Le Docteur Pascal*" de Zola : *rétrospective des "Rougon-Macquart"*, livre de documents, roman à thèse (Lund: Osten Sodergård, 1980), pp.71-72).

⁸ Our interest is not in the detail of Pascal's theories and experiments. Closer studies of Pascal's credo and medical aspirations are to be found in the works by Sven Kellner mentioned above and in Yves Malinas' study *Zola et les hérédités imaginaires* (Paris: Expansion scientifique française, 1985). The former is a more general account, the latter a detailed assessment of the medical and scientific implications of Pascal's philosophy and medical practices.

⁹ He is 'très connu et très écouté du monde savant' (*Fortune* 67), and the doctor has 'une réputation parmi les savants' (*Pascal* 927) due in part to the 'très remarquables mémoires qu'il envoyait parfois à l'Académie de médecine' (944).

Ah! ne plus être malade, ne plus souffrir, mourir le moins possible! Son rêve aboutissait à cette pensée qu'on pourrait hâter le bonheur universel, la cité future de perfection et de félicité, en intervenant, en assurant de la santé à tous. Lorsque tous seraient sains, forts, intelligents, il n'y aurait plus qu'un peuple supérieur, infiniment sage et heureux. (*Pascal* 948)

In this enunciation of Pascal's belief his objective is stated as 'bonheur universel', a formulation which would not be out of place in the mouths of our other revolutionary characters. Nouns such as 'perfection' and 'félicité' and the adjective 'heureux' serve to underline the utopian nature of the goal.¹⁰ He identifies the importance of seeking out truth through the acquisition of knowledge ('intelligents'), the need for work and effort ('sains' and 'forts'). His search for the 'bonheur universel' remains a stable aspiration for Pascal, he simply adopts a different approach to achieving it.

For our purposes the important aspect of Pascal's career is the change of focus which occurs part way through the novel. Hinging on his attitude towards medical intervention and his 'alchimie du vingtième siècle', Pascal becomes a 'médecin philosophe', deciding that rather than interfering with nature, it is better to let it run its course.¹¹ He reserves for the medical profession the possibility to treat suffering.¹² From the delusions of grandeur to which he fell prey in the early stages of the novel, Pascal starts to see the limitations of science to explain everything.¹³ He recants his earlier hubris and adopts instead a more modest approach, seeking guidance from 'la vie'.

And Pascal the man? His spirit of 'fraternité' (*Pascal* 1023) and his 'amour des autres, un attendrissement fraternel' (961) is apparent beneath his feint at scientific impassivity. Adjectives such as 'tolérant' and nouns like 'bonté' are frequently used

¹⁰ Pascal tones down his expectations of what science can achieve, as Kellner points out: 'La réalité lui avait aussi appris qu'une société quelconque ne parvient jamais à un point de perfection malgré certains progrès possibles' (Kellner, *Pascal*, p.81).

¹¹ As he says to Ramond: "Et moi qui crois, au fond, que l'unique sagesse est de ne pas intervenir, de laisser faire la nature!" (*Pascal* 1178). David Baguley remarks that 'en chaque homme de science qui veut connaître les lois de la nature se dissimule l'alchimiste avec son rêve de dominer et de transformer la Nature' (CN 48 (1974), p.162).

¹² On his death bed Pascal appears to advocate accepting everything about nature, including suffering.

¹³ 'Sans nier la science et sans jamais remettre en question sa nécessité et son utilité, Pascal commence pourtant à vaciller un peu dans sa foi en la science' (Kellner, *Pascal*, p.141).

to describe him.¹⁴ He is generous with both his time and his finances, not charging his patients for consultations, more often than not making charitable distributions during his medical rounds.¹⁵ As we shall see his generosity is shared by the female porte-paroles. For Sven Kellner, Pascal is Zola's ideal man (complementing, for us, the female porte-paroles as ideal females):

Il est en quelque sorte un mélange des idéaux de ce dernier : l'étendue de son savoir et de son expérience acquis au cours de ses recherches médicales a fait de ce docteur un savant compétent, un homme de science mais aussi un grand humanitaire dont le désintéressement vise à une existence meilleure pour l'humanité.¹⁶

The four female porte-parole characters are a coherent unit in the novels. This grouping is justified by the similarity of their characteristics and a coincidence of terminology used to describe them. Whilst the combination of attributes and attitudes is not identical in each case, the parallels between these characters are established at the level of vocabulary, in the pattern of words chosen to describe the positive qualities assigned to each of these characters. It cannot be seen as purely coincidental when the same words are used repeatedly of these characters, suggesting that they represent a 'type' which Zola was keen to include in his cycle of novels.

They display a strikingly similar attitude towards life and those around them. They share many of the same positive qualities such as compassion, which is expressed sometimes as pity,¹⁷ hope,¹⁸ tolerance,¹⁹ common sense,²⁰ straight-talking,²¹ courage

¹⁴ His face has a 'finesse pleine de bonté' (*Faute* 1246), and Clotilde observes 'ses traits fins, où riait la bonté' (*Pascal* 1068), reflecting his capacity for 'bonté immense' (1140), or even 'bonté si exaltée' (1056). His 'esprit large' (922) complements his 'large tolérance' (934).

¹⁵ 'Souvent, cela lui arrivait, de payer ses malades, au lieu d'être payé' (*Pascal* 956).

¹⁶ Kellner, *Pascal*, p.68. Henri Guillemin puts it simply : 'le docteur Pascal est cette créature inventée à laquelle Zola aurait souhaité d'être semblable' (Guillemin, *Présentation*, p.412).

¹⁷ Caroline : 'morte dans la douleur des autres' (*Argent* 68), 'sympathie tendre' (69), 'inquiète sympathie' (146), 'sans force devant la peine des autres' (172), 'pitié infinie' (353, 372), 'éperdue de pitié' (358), 'sa pitié pour la douleur' (388), 'Mme Caroline, que la souffrance attirait' (391), 'bouleversée de pitié et de tendresse' (394), 'une divine pitié' (395). Denise : 'le cœur se noyait de compassion' (*Bonheur* 610), 'toujours prête à donner son cœur' (726), 'pitié' (727), 'sa pratique de cœur tendre' (728), 'une pitié navrée' (748). Pauline : 'pitié inquiète' (*Joie* 828), 'compassion' (885), 'ce grand cœur' (891), 'pitié pour tant de douleur' (943), 'pitié immense' (968), "'Pauvres gens!'" (986), 'une pitié charitable' (1061). Clotilde : 'attendrissement' (*Pascal* 982), 'attendrie' (1094).

¹⁸ Caroline : 'gonflée d'un espoir immense' (*Argent* 73), 'elle était l'invincible espoir' (227), 'invincible espoir' (395, 398). Denise : 'espérance' (*Bonheur* 414). Pauline : 'l'espoir du lendemain' (*Joie* 884), 'espérance tendre' (1061). Clotilde : 'elle ne pouvait ne pas espérer, tellement son cœur était gonflé de l'éternelle espérance' (*Pascal* 1218), 'elle était l'espérance' (1219).

and bravery,²² happiness.²³ They are calm and gentle, even when exercising authority,²⁴ reasonable,²⁵ infused with kindness and goodness,²⁶ honest,²⁷ devoted and

¹⁹ Caroline : 'grande tolérance' (*Argent* 60, 205), 'geste de tolérance' (245), 'tolérance' (336), 'tolérance universelle' (385). Pauline : 'la tolérance de sa charité' (*Joie* 900), 'tolérance désespérée' (1115).

²⁰ Caroline : 'd'un bon sens si solide' (*Argent* 75), 'grand bon sens' (112), 'clair bon sens' (163), 'd'un bon sens si brave' (163). Denise : 'le bon sens' (*Bonheur* 724). Pauline : 'économe et prudente' (*Joie* 880), 'Pauline, qui seule gardait toute sa tête' (969), 'bonne ménagère' (994), 'ménagère prudente' (1017), 'bon sens pratique' (1018). Clotilde : 'très peu dépensière' (*Pascal* 951), 'lui faire de sages remontrances' (1071), 'prévoyante' (1118).

²¹ Caroline : 'gaie franchise' (*Argent* 170), 'bel emportement de franchise' (333). Denise : 'une telle franchise d'innocence' (*Bonheur* 636), 'sa belle franchise' (723), 'la voix douce, avare de paroles inutiles' (724), 'elle parlait dans la simplicité de son âme' (728), 'horreur du mensonge' (732). Pauline : 'sa nature franche' (*Joie* 875), 'la franchise de son innocence' (899). Clotilde : 'très franche' (*Pascal* 1057).

²² Caroline : 'courage à vivre extraordinaire' (*Argent* 60), 'bravoure joyeuse' (60), 'brave' (61, 217), 'bravoure à vivre' (65), 'beau rire de bravoure' (73), 'vaillante' (73), 'bravoure' (136, 223), 'd'un bon sens si brave' (163), 'guerrière' (216), 'si courageuse à vivre' (292), 'vaillance' (341). Denise : 'courage' (*Bonheur* 474, 505, 706), 'son grand courage' (504), 'bravoure' (504), 'faire la brave' (505), 'courageuse' (536), 'vaillance' (677), 'son calme brave' (694), 'bravement' (728). Pauline : 'si beau courage' (*Joie* 866), 'tranquille bravoure' (899), 'beau courage' (920), 'résignation courageuse' (921), 'beau calme courageux' (952), 'bravoure' (968), 'vaillance' (966), 'courage à vivre' (1047), 'gaieté vaillante' (1047), 'son rire de vaillance' (1130). Clotilde : 'dans une bravoure qui acceptait la responsabilité de son acte' (*Pascal* 934), 'vaillance' (1067), 'sa droiture vaillante' (1138), '[s]es lettres étaient pleines de vaillance' (1161), 'brave' (1218).

²³ Caroline : 'bonhomie' (*Argent* 60), 'bravoure joyeuse' (60), "'je ne peux pas être triste'" (73), 'beau rire de bravoure' (73), 'gaie' (74), 'joie naturelle, inhérente à sa santé même' (74), 'gaie franchise' (170), 'paix souriante' (171), 'joie immortelle' (227), 'flot de la joie' (396). Denise : 'toute une certitude de joie' (*Bonheur* 414), 'souriante' (504), 'sa paix d'enfant' (517), 'sans se permettre un geste d'humeur' (634), 'la douceur obstinée' (634), 'la conviction souriante' (634), 'la gaieté' (706). Pauline : 'gaieté bruyante et saine' (*Joie* 817), 'gaieté d'une personne de raison que l'absurde met en joie' (817), 'tranquille sourire' (833), 'd'une bonté si riante' (866), 'calme souriant' (875), 'rire sonore' (884), 'douceur gaie de sa nature' (945), 'maturité riante d'une bonne ménagère' (994), 'belle humeur' (996), 'gaieté [...] tranquille' (1047), 'gaieté vaillante' (1047), 'son rire de vaillance' (1130), 'son rire éclatant sonnait le bonheur' (1130). Clotilde : 'saine et heureuse' (*Pascal* 968), 'une gaie' (1067), 'sa sérénité riante' (1076), 'gaieté vive' (1118), 'sérénité heureuse' (1211).

²⁴ Caroline : 'affection calmante' (*Argent* 163), 'humeur toujours égale' (171). Denise : 'son air tranquille et doux' (*Bonheur* 413), 'cette douceur invincible' (504), 'douceur' (505, 652, 706), 'sans se permettre un geste d'humeur' (634), 'cette sérénité dans la patience' (634), 'cette douceur obstinée' (634), 'son insistance polie' (635), 'sa douceur polie' (637), 'son attitude calme' (639), 'tout son charme pour désarmer ses ennemies' (652), 'beau calme' (672), 'redoutable dans sa douceur' (701), 'une autorité absolue, par sa douceur même' (702), 'le juste équilibre' (724), 'le triomphe paisible et charmant' (726), 'douce' (726), 'humeur égale' (726), 'son air tendre et invincible' (729), 'l'unique charme de sa douceur' (730). It is worth noting that it is precisely Denise's calm sweetness which is the key to her success and the source of her power - her use of her good nature to overwhelm and disarm her opponents is her major weapon, one to which Pauline also has recourse. Pauline : 'tranquille' (*Joie* 813), 'tranquille sourire' (833), 'tendresse active' (856), 'calme souriant' (875), 'tranquillité de fille savante et vierge' (876), 'tranquille bravoure' (899), 'calme' (943, 1008, 1090), 'douceur gaie de sa nature' (945), 'beau calme courageux' (952), 'le calme résigné' (968), 'tendresse' (968), 'son air paisible' (994), 'belle humeur' (996), 'douceur à vivre' (996), 'égalité de caractère qui désarmait les mauvais vouloirs' (996), 'son air de douce autorité' (1019), 'grand calme' (1046). Clotilde : 'docilement' (*Pascal* 919), 'soumission si caressante' (920), 'très douce' (1075), 'tendresse' (1118), 'ses grands yeux tendres' (1149), 'tendresse immense' (1212).

²⁵ Caroline : 'le regard raisonnable' (*Argent* 80), 'haute raison' (388). Denise : 'une raison sans cesse agissante' (*Bonheur* 504), 'raison droite' (513), 'raison' (536, 677, 724, 730), 'tranquille visage de fille raisonnable' (585), 'son air raisonnable' (669), 'sa tête raisonneuse et avisée de Normande' (727).

loyal,²⁸ actively opposed to evil and injustice.²⁹ Their attitude to justice will be discussed below.

Observing that these are primarily bourgeois qualities,³⁰ Brian Nelson sees the female porte-parole characters as ideal women, with maternal overtones:

[A] group of female characters who, altruistic and self-sacrificing, represent the values of hope, stoicism and fecundity, and reflect Zola's ideal of woman as a source and nourisher of life. This series of ideal women includes Denise Baudu, Pauline Quenu, Henriette Sandoz, Caroline Hamelin, Henriette Weiss, Clotilde Rougon, Marie (*Paris*) and Josine (*Travail*). These women embody a healthy constancy and an optimistic faith in life in the face of suffering and injustice. Sane and balanced, consoling rather than consuming, they dispense calm, protection and security. They are, in other words, mother-figures: the virtues of Zola's ideal women (compassion, kindness, self-abnegation) are matriarchal ones.³¹

Chantal Bertrand-Jennings is quick to point out that these women are subordinated to males:

Les vertus de bonté, de douceur, de chaste tendresse, de dévouement soumis, de raison, d'humilité que partagent la plupart des héroïnes idéales les voue au service de l'homme dont elles ont pour mission d'améliorer le sort.³²

Pauline: 'belle santé raisonnable' (*Joie* 833), 'jeune tête raisonneuse' (849), 'si raisonnable' (866), 'raison froide' (949), 'raison' (1022, 1039), 'raisonna longuement' (1030). Clotilde: 'trop raisonnable' (*Pascal* 980), 'très raisonnable' (981).

²⁶ Caroline: 'bonté' (*Argent* 57), 'une telle expression de bonté' (143). Denise: 'cœur tendre' (*Bonheur* 728), 'bonté' (730), 'bonté en pleurs' (760). Pauline: 'bonté navrée' (*Joie* 828), 'bonté si riante' (866), 'grand cœur' (891), 'bonté' (904, 996, 1009, 1030, 1047, 1129), 'bonté impuissante' (968).

²⁷ Caroline: 'sa nature droite' (*Argent* 112), 'la droiture de sa claire intelligence' (116), 'droiture' (163), 'se croyant sans illusions' (206), 'sa droiture de femme' (219). Denise: 'droite' (*Bonheur* 504), 'raison droite' (513), 'l'honnêteté' (514), 'correcte' (637), 'toute droite' (722), 'amour de la vérité et de la logique' (730), 'horreur du mensonge' (732), 'tout son être juste et bon' (760). Pauline: 'si droite' (*Joie* 832, 875), 'nature droite' (946).

²⁸ Denise: 'toujours prête à donner son cœur' (*Bonheur* 726). Pauline: 'débordante de tendresse et de dévouement' (*Joie* 996).

²⁹ Caroline: 'la haine même du mal' (*Argent* 360), 'sa volonté de justice' (361), 'haine du mal' (388). Denise: 'révoltée contre l'injustice' (*Bonheur* 498), 'elle ne faisait pas le mal' (730), 'tout son être juste et bon' (760). Pauline: 'une révolte de l'idée de justice' (*Joie* 996).

³⁰ 'It is important to note that all of Zola's ideal heroines are or become bourgeois women, that his delineation of the ideal feminine type reflects his approval of certain bourgeois values (hard work, sobriety, honnêteté, order, moderation), and that, throughout most of his career, he held conventional, bourgeois views on marriage, the family and sexual morality' (*Zola and the Bourgeoisie: a study of themes and techniques in "Les Rougon-Macquart"* (London: Macmillan, 1983), p.54).

³¹ Nelson, *Bourgeoisie*, p.56.

³² Bertrand-Jennings, *L'Eros et la femme*, p.119. She does concede that a beneficial impact might be derived from their supporting role: 'Denise Baudu et Caroline Hamelin aident dans leur lutte mercantile ou financière les conquérants Octave Mouret et Saccard dont elles adoucissent certains aspects trop monstrueux de leur génie' (*ibid.*). She uses the example of Mme Caroline to prove her point: 'Cette

The female porte-parole characters are almost too good to be true. But as Bertrand-Jennings observes, for female characters to be good characters, they need to be very good indeed.³³

If these parallels at the level of vocabulary do not suffice to convince that these characters form a coherent group, reference to the preparatory dossiers of the novels further enforces the case by showing the connections which Zola himself noted between the characters.³⁴ These preliminary documents also serve to show Zola's consistent attitude towards the way in which these characters are presented in the final version of the novels, where the images and vocabulary used in the preparatory notes reappear.³⁵

It is worthwhile remarking that these are characters into which Zola invested a degree of his own personality and philosophy, as the *aide-mémoires* in the *ébauches* underline.³⁶ In his notes to the Pléiade edition of *Les Rougon-Macquart*, Henri

dernière, veuve elle aussi, s'est mise entièrement au service des hommes qui l'entourent : son frère l'ingénieur Hamelin, son amant le financier Saccard et Victor, le fils adultérin de celui-ci' (p.104). Brian Nelson adds : 'His [Zola's] ideal woman, seen as a loyal wife, devoted mother and efficient ménagère, is defined by her relationship to her mate' (Nelson, *Bourgeoisie*, p.54).

³³ 'La femme ne saurait donc être conçue comme symbole du bien que si elle est bonne mère, ou vierge, ou chastement dévouée et martyre, le cumul de tous ces attributs étant d'ailleurs fort souhaitable' (Bertrand-Jennings, *Eros et la Femme*, p.105).

³⁴ This is seen clearly in the preparatory material for *Argent*, where Zola plans the character of Mme Caroline through whom many of the threads of the plot are connected. In fos 405-406 of the *ébauche* he reminds himself: 'plus Pauline, plus le sacrifice, mais la vie par la droiture, la franchise' (*RM V* 1248), and assigns her the role of 'un peu le cœur antique, le personnage qui jugera, qui sera la bonté, la justice' (*ibid.*). Henri Mitterand remarks in his notes how the closeness between Caroline and Pauline is nevertheless clear : 'Et tout de même un personnage bien proche de Pauline, de *la Joie de vivre*' (1249). As concerns the notion of the female porte-parole characters being a 'type', Mitterand suggests in his discussion of Pauline : 'Mais comme nous l'avons déjà remarqué à propos d'autres œuvres, Pauline Quenu semble bien issue d'archétypes enfouis plus ou moins profondément dans la mémoire subconsciente de l'écrivain' (*RM III* 1741).

³⁵ For example, in the *ébauche* for *Bonheur*, Denise is presented as 'magrionne au début, timide raillée, presque ahurie, écrasée; puis peu à peu je la développe au milieu de l'élégance du magasin, elle se fait' (*RM III* 1683). Zola reminds himself not to make her too close to Mouret's first wife, Madame Hédouin, though Mouret does recognise certain characteristics in Denise which he admired in his first wife, namely her common sense, her calm attitude and her aversion to unnecessary chatter (*Bonheur* 724). The preliminary notes also reveal Zola's intention to work a transformation in the character of Denise through her experience of working in the department store and living in Paris, deciding to have her come from a provincial town, as Henri Mitterand describes it 'pour la faire encore plus timide et plus humble' (*RM III* 1684) at the start of the novel.

³⁶ Henri Mitterand's discussion of the relationship between Pauline and Lazare in *Joie* (*RM III* 1741) contains the suggestion that in these opposing characters Zola was presenting two paradoxical aspects of his own personality.

Mitterand draws tentative conclusions as to the extent of Zola's presence in these characters. For our purposes, the degree of identification between the author and his creations (or creatures) is not in itself a critical point, though it can serve as further evidence to highlight their special status.³⁷ Philip Walker suggests that Zola spread himself and his views through a number of characters, and it is when this group is taken as a whole that the author emerges most reliably.³⁸

Underlined on a couple of occasions in *Argent* is Mme Caroline's belief that her case is that of humanity writ small, which is an important confirmation of her value as a porte-parole. Here she explains her position to her brother and Saccard:

‘J’ai pensé souvent que mon cas est, en petit, celui de l’humanité, qui vit, certes, dans une misère affreuse, mais que ragaillardit la jeunesse de chaque génération.’³⁹

The term ‘porte-parole’ has not been used lightly in this chapter. These are characters who operate in the novels as the spokeswoman for particular philosophies or principles. Sven Kellner sees Pauline as the representative of two points of view : ‘le culte de la vie et la croyance à la science’ (Kellner, *Emile Zola*, p.146), and she is one of several characters used in *Joie* in that way : ‘ce livre est un roman à thèse, ses personnages étant porteurs des idées d’ordre essentiellement philosophiques’ (*ibid.*).

³⁷ For example, in his comments on the preparatory notes for *Argent*, Mitterand suggests that much of Mme Caroline's stance and attitude to life is informed by Zola's own outlook : ‘Zola dispose tout de même d’un modèle : ses propres convictions, son propre *credo*’ (*RM* V 1248).

³⁸ ‘He could thus portray as many of his own different traits as he pleased without making any of his dramatis personae overly complex or incoherent. This too Zola did. Each of his mouthpieces, *alter egos*, and the like is no more complicated than many other fictional creations. As a group, however, they come much closer to reflecting the man in all his complexity and roundness than any one of them does individually’ (‘Zola and the art of containing the uncontrollable’, in *Craft of Fiction*, pp.28-43, p.34). ‘He not only populated his fiction with part-time or full-time mouthpieces, avatars, *alter egos*, realistic or idealized veiled self-portraits - Pascal Rougon, Lazare Chanteau, Pauline Quenu, Etienne Lantier, Sandoz, Claude Lantier, Madame Caroline and all the rest. He imparted to the narratives in which many of these characters appear a strongly autobiographical quality. While many writers content themselves with only one or two such works - usually their maiden efforts - he kept on producing them, year after year, decade after decade’ (*ibid.*, p.32).

³⁹ *Argent* 74. There is a parallel in *Pascal*. Pascal is convinced that his careful study of his family can serve wider purposes, as the family is ‘une humanité en raccourci’ (*Pascal* 1219). He tells Clotilde that “‘l’histoire de notre famille, qui est l’histoire de toutes, de l’humanité entière”” (1004). He continues : “‘Oui, notre famille pourrait, aujourd’hui, suffire d’exemples à la science [...] Et elle est aussi un document d’histoire, elle raconte le second Empire, du coup d’Etat à Sedan, car les nôtres sont partis du peuple, se sont répandus parmi toute la société contemporaine”” (1015).

Monica Lebron examines how Zola developed the character of Mme Caroline, and catalogues the investment of effort he made to create a complex character who could perform a special function in the novel.⁴⁰ The preparatory notes for *Argent* reveal how Mme Caroline's character was planned as the receptacle for one of the key themes of the novel, namely an optimistic belief in life:

Cela aussi pourrait me donner aussi [sic] ce que je voudrais, l'amour de la vie quand même, malgré le pessimisme : tout croule mais l'invincible espoir en la vie qui est sans cesse en travail. Dire la vérité quand même, et espérer. L'amour de la vie pour la vie.⁴¹

These characters incarnate ideas and themes, almost to the exclusion of existing neutrally as characters in the plot, as Halina Suwala concludes from her study of the *ébauche* of *Argent*:

Au cours des années 1880, on observe une 'idéologisation' de plus en plus sensible des romans de Zola, qui se manifeste entre autres par l'introduction du personnage porte-parole de l'auteur. Apparu pour la première fois dans *Au Bonheur des Dames* (Denise Baudu), où Zola postule 'un changement complet de philosophie' et veut 'rompre avec le pessimisme', réapparu dans *La Joie de vivre*, avec Pauline, le personnage porte-parole disparaît dans la plupart des romans qui suivent, pour revenir, triomphalement, dans *L'Argent* avec Mme Caroline. On le repère ensuite sans peine dans *Le Docteur Pascal* et les romans des deux derniers cycles.⁴²

Frequent use of *discours indirect libre* and some relatively lengthy didactic passages further serve to underline the way in which these characters operate at an ideological level in *Les Rougon-Macquart*. So intimately associated are they with a particular viewpoint that it becomes hard to distinguish them from the ideological thrust of their function. In other words, the messengers become the message.

Pascal Rougon's privileged position in the cycle has already been referred to, and his assessment of these characters is presented in *Pascal*, and it serves further to record

⁴⁰ 'Zola a mis énormément de soins dans la construction du personnage de Mme Caroline, afin que sa complexité, son intelligence, sa flexibilité morale et sa bonté naturelle puissent atteindre un équilibre si parfait qu'elle ne fût tour à tour ni une prude, ni un ange, ni une prétentieuse' ('Madame Caroline. Expéditions discursives dans *L'Argent*', *CN*, 73 (1999), 217-225, p.218).

⁴¹ *RM V* 1247. It is clear from this expression of one of the key themes of the novel that a receptacle for this philosophy is required. It is a pattern seen in other novels, as Henri Mitterand observes: 'Ainsi apparaît le caractère de Mme Caroline, né, comme le plus souvent, non pas d'une figure de femme réelle, mais de la personnification d'une attitude morale' (*RM V* 1248).

⁴² 'L'ébauche de *L'Argent*', in *Miscellanées Mitterand*, pp.39-55 (p.47).

the essentially positive qualities of the female porte-paroles. Pascal qualifies Mme Caroline as 'adorable' (*Pascal* 1010), the heroine of *Bonheur* is 'une petite fille vengeresse, la très simple et très sage Denise',⁴³ while Pauline evidently finds much favour with Pascal, who describes her to Clotilde in much detail:

'[L]a plus saine, la plus humaine des filles, Pauline Quenu, la pondérée, la raisonnable, la vierge qui savait et qui acceptait la vie, d'une telle passion dans son amour des autres, que, malgré la révolte de sa puberté féconde, elle donnait à une amie son fiancé Lazare, puis sauvait l'enfant du ménage désuni, devenait sa mère véritable, toujours sacrifiée, ruinée, triomphante et gaie.'⁴⁴

Pauline knows and accepts life, an attitude which is one of the key attributes of this group of characters. Their positive attitude towards 'la vie' will be discussed below, when the connection between it and the 'but ignoré' (the concept to which we have been referring throughout the thesis) is made. The consequent calm confidence serves as a point of comparison with the other groups of characters we have met so far - the miners of Chapter Two, the representatives of the legal system in Chapter Three, the revolutionaries of the previous chapter - and, when taken in association with what appears to be the very special status of Pascal and the female porte-parole characters, they appear to be exemplars of an optimistic approach to life, thoroughly approved of in the novels.

The 'but ignoré'

Discernible in *Les Rougon-Macquart* is a pattern of movement towards a new order which we have called the 'but ignoré' throughout the thesis, and to which we alluded briefly at the start of this chapter. A discussion of the vocabulary used in the novels will explain this concept in more detail, and identify some of the key terms used in the texts. In spite of the differing terminology used, be it 'évolution', 'logique', 'progrès'

⁴³ *Pascal* 1011. 'Vengeresse' refers to the function attributed to Denise by her colleagues as an employee who stood up to her boss, and it also alludes to her role as a woman who brought Octave Mouret, the arch-manipulator of womankind, to his knees. There is also a hint here of the class-based sexual revenge with which Nana and Jacqueline (*Terre*) are also associated.

⁴⁴ *Pascal* 1012. Note how Pascal's assessment touches on all the bases important for Zola, as it covers her physical, emotional and philosophical aspects, and encapsulates the ideas present throughout *Joie* and is expressed in the very same terms. Note also how the passage echoes the patterns of vocabulary associated with Pauline which we catalogued earlier.

or the more common 'vie' ('nature'), the movements are much of a muchness, each representing a force beyond the human realm whose impetus is driving the world forward towards what appears to be a better society. As we shall see from close textual analysis, elements of this new order appear to include justice, which is an exciting prospect from our point of view.

Contained within *Les Rougon-Macquart* is a distinct forward movement. Towards what is never made completely clear, as the term 'but ignoré' suggests. Pascal and the female porte-parole characters, however, give an optimistic 'spin' to the objective of this progression which they perceive to be in operation. The force and importance of the 'but ignoré' are in stark contrast to the fleeting and subtle references to it which pepper the later novels in the cycle. Glimpsed rather than exhibited in the texts, there is nevertheless a pattern of references which establishes its existence and its characteristics.

This section is divided into two parts, the first establishes the movement forwards in the novels, and the second examines the characteristics and components of the objective itself. The movement towards the 'but ignoré' is supported by patterns of imagery, which shall be discussed briefly, as shall be a structural element of especially the later novels in the cycle.

It is clear that there is a movement afoot in the novels, a movement which has an end in view. There is a pattern of vocabulary suggesting progression towards an end, imagery suggesting an inexorable and irresistible movement forwards. For example, in *Argent*, the idea of progress which Saccard hopes to facilitate is linked closely to the notion of movement : 'la marche en avant, irrésistible' (*Argent* 77). Furthermore, this impetus is of a social nature : 'la poussée sociale qui se rue au plus de bonheur possible' (*ibid.*). An interesting qualification is the ignorance in which humanity moves towards the goal, not necessarily ignorance of the goal but ignorance of the movement towards it.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ For example : 'sans savoir au juste où l'on va' (*Argent* 77) and 'auquel nous allons sans le savoir' (398).

In *Pascal*, however, Clotilde claims a commitment to the common goal 'que nous accomplissons tous avec passion' (*Pascal* 1063). The fact of being on the move towards an end seems to go some way towards explaining the otherwise inexplicable optimism and obstinacy in the face of unpleasantness and unfairness, at least in Mme Caroline's case. For her it is the movement 'qui nous gonfle le cœur de l'obstiné besoin de vivre et d'espérer'.⁴⁶

There are also examples of terminology suggesting an objective, the most obvious of which is the word 'but' itself.⁴⁷ There is also 'bout' used in *Argent* (226). The idea of effort towards an end is suggested by 'besogne',⁴⁸ which complements the terms 'travail' (*Argent* 77), 'œuvre' (*Pascal* 1024, 1063) and 'labeur' which is used frequently in *Pascal*.⁴⁹

This objective remains mysterious, and is hard to pin down in the texts. The terminology used to describe the objective alerts the reader to this. 'Ignoré' itself is one such indication. Adjectives such as 'obscur' (*Argent* 398), 'mystérieux' (*Pascal* 1018, 1024), 'ignoré' (*Terre* 811, *Pascal* 1014, 1018), 'inconnu' (*Argent* 226, 397) and 'infini' do suggest a scale which might escape encapsulation. Not only is the nature of the goal vague, but it is also unclear how, or whether, it will be revealed. A parallel is drawn in *Argent* between this goal and a 'plaisir toujours différé' (*Argent* 397) which suggests that it may never arrive. What is important, however, is the positive vibe which the concept exudes, and upon which the characters seize with confidence.

In addition, the time-scale is unclear. In *Argent* 'lointain' is employed,⁵⁰ as is 'générations nouvelles' (*Argent* 135) which suggests a very long term goal, as does the use of 'âge' (*Débâcle* 454). In *Argent*, the movement towards 'bonheur' has been going on for as long as life itself, and perhaps is life itself:

⁴⁶ *Argent* 398. Her optimism is shared by Etienne Lantier, who, in spite of the failure of the strike, is confident that better times lie ahead. He leaves Montsou 'pénétré de cet espoir' (*Germinal* 1588).

⁴⁷ It is used in *Terre* (811), in *Argent* (397, 398) and in *Pascal* (1018).

⁴⁸ In *Terre*, for example, the earth is described as 'la grande travailleuse, éternellement à sa besogne' (811).

⁴⁹ For example : 993, 1018, 1020, 1063, 1106.

⁵⁰ *Argent* 397, 398. 'Lointaine' is used in *Pascal* (1024).

[C]ette course au bonheur qui a été la marche même de l'humanité, de siècle en siècle, vers plus de joie et plus de lumière. (*Argent* 81)

A further measure of uncertainty relates to the extent of the characters' understanding of the 'but ignoré'. Will there be a moment of revelation at which the mists lift and all is clear to everyone? Or, as vocabulary such as 'immortelle' and 'infini' suggests, is it beyond the realm of human understanding? More likely is that certain initiates, such as Pascal, might have particular insight.

Although 'ignoré' the goal is not quite as mysterious as all that. There are clues in the novels as to the components and characteristics of the objective. The aim is relatively precise in *Germinal*, intimately related as it is to the contemporary socio-political situation, and the movement is associated with bringing to the ground the already toppling capitalist order.⁵¹ Unlike the special case of *Germinal*, in other novels this movement is less clearly associated with a concrete political and social situation.⁵² In *Argent*, for example, Mme Caroline realises that she will never understand 'l'éternel inconnu qui était au bout de la vie, au bout de l'humanité'.⁵³

One important point to be made about the indications in the novels as to the nature of the 'but ignoré' is that the goal appears to be positive, that it represents an improvement on the current situation. Terms such as 'bonheur' (*Argent* 77) and 'supérieur' (*Argent* 398) suggest this. Also used, primarily in *Germinal*, are words relating to renewal and newness, again referring to an overhaul of present circumstances.⁵⁴ In *Argent*, 'joie' (81) and 'lumière' (81) are also used. 'Joie' seems to connect to 'bonheur' and the 'lumière' is almost certainly symbolic - knowledge

⁵¹ *Germinal* is exceptional too as to time-frame. Whereas the other novels deal in 'lointain' and 'siècles', in *Germinal* 'bientôt' (1591) and 'prochaine' (1589) are used. 'Fin de siècle' (1589) represents a relatively short time frame, although slightly longer than the one year envisaged in the following passage: '[L]e vieux monde voulait vivre un printemps encore' (1588).

⁵² In *Bonheur*, for example, Octave Mouret is aware that he has seized an opportunity at the appropriate moment: 'le triomphe des cités ouvrières et industrielles était semé par le coup de vent du siècle, qui emportait l'édifice croulant des vieux âges' (747). He sees in his impact on the local business community that 'il faisait simplement la besogne de son âge' (*ibid.*).

⁵³ *Argent* 226. Note how her reflection refers to both the unknown element 'inconnu' and also the idea of an objective or destination 'bout'. We can see how Zola uses terms such as 'humanité' and 'vie' interchangeably.

⁵⁴ For example: 'une nouvelle terre repousserait' (*Germinal* 1437), as will a 'société nouvelle' (1589). The word 'régénérant' (*ibid.*) also suggests this notion.

maybe, as the 'savants' below suggests? In *Débâcle* those who will bring about and perpetuate the new order are the 'plus savants', the 'plus sains' and the 'plus forts' (454). It is a good mix of the physical and intellectual competences which tie in to the 'juste emploi de l'être entier' of Pascal's *credo*.⁵⁵

Neide de Faria refers to an 'ébauche d'espérance' setting in with *Pascal*.⁵⁶ Françoise Naudin-Patriat sees no reason to believe that the 'but ignoré' will be anything other than positive:

Le dénouement, car il y en aura un, le romancier ignore ce qu'il sera. Cet inconnu, il ne l'attend pas avec l'angoisse de certains de ses contemporains, mais avec l'optimisme et la confiance qu'il porte à la vie, certain que l'avenir fera progresser.⁵⁷

The fact that the objective is 'ignoré' does present the possibility that there might be an unpleasant surprise in store. Some critics have highlighted the essential mystery of the concept. Guy Robert, for example, makes a poetic observation:

Les temps qui vont succéder à un âge moribond restent encore indistincts dans les brumes de leur aurore. Apportent-ils plus de justice et de bonheur?⁵⁸

Auguste Dezalay also leaves the options open:

On ne sait plus, finalement, malgré l'optimisme qu'il professe, si c'est vers un monde meilleur, ou vers une nouvelle époque de barbarie que Zola fait glisser l'humanité.⁵⁹

The outlook is somewhat bleaker at the end of *Bête*, for example. Whilst there is certainty that a movement is in progress towards something new, there is no guarantee

⁵⁵ The reference to 'sains' perhaps foreshadows the particular idea of health prescribed by Doctor Pascal in the final novel of the cycle. Pascal identifies two elements of the goal 'son labeur final de santé et de force' (*Pascal* 1106), the health interest is repeated elsewhere in his clinical aspirations: 'refaire une humanité bien portante et plus haute' (1033). We will examine the implications of the 'juste emploi de l'être entier' below.

⁵⁶ *Structure et unité dans "Les Rougon-Macquart": la poétique du cycle* (Paris: Nizet, 1977), p.74.

⁵⁷ *Ténèbres et lumière de l'argent: la représentation de l'ordre social dans "Les Rougon-Macquart"* (Dijon: Université de Dijon, 1981), p.166. Nor is Sven Kellner in any doubt: 'En effet, c'est l'optimisme qui forme l'unité de l'œuvre de Zola. [...] Mais ces tragédies sont des éléments simples d'un ensemble au-dessus duquel s'élève la vie' (Kellner, *Emile Zola*, p.254).

⁵⁸ *Emile Zola: principes et caractères généraux de son œuvre* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1952), p.103.

⁵⁹ *L'Opéra des "Rougon-Macquart": essai de rythmologie romanesque* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1983), p.25.

that it will be good.⁶⁰ For Zola's porte-paroles, however, there is no doubt.

Expressed in passages such as the following, we can see the idea of a progression towards a mysterious destination, a destination which the initiates infuse with an optimism, as befits the objective of their alternative religion.

Elle ['la vie'] poursuivait son œuvre, se propageait selon ses lois, indifférente aux hypothèses, en marche pour son labeur infini. [...] La vie, la vie qui coule en torrent, qui continue et recommence, vers l'achèvement ignoré! (*Pascal* 1219)

Two of the most detailed depictions of the new world order appear in *Argent*, the following passage is Mme Caroline's assimilation of Saccard's dream of what can be achieved in the Middle East with scientific progress and an injection of cash:

Et c'était bien cela qu'elle voyait se dresser de nouveau, la marche en avant, irrésistible, la poussée sociale qui se rue au plus de bonheur possible, le besoin d'agir, d'aller devant soi, sans savoir au juste où l'on va, mais d'aller plus à l'aise, dans des conditions meilleures; et le globe bouleversé par la fourmilière qui refait sa maison, et le continuel travail, de nouvelles jouissances conquises, le pouvoir de l'homme décuplé, la terre lui appartenant chaque jour davantage. L'argent, aidant la science, faisait le progrès. (*Argent* 77)

Things to note in the passage include the notion of movement towards a goal, which has been discussed above. 'Plus de bonheur possible', 'plus à l'aise', 'conditions meilleures' and 'jouissances conquises' seem to suggest the improving of humanity's lot, the making easier of modern life. This ties in to 'toute une humanité plus heureuse' (135) and 'l'humanité élargie et plus heureuse' (398) which Saccard seems to have as his objective in the Middle East. Pascal identifies three key components of the improved humanity which he envisages, namely 'refaite', 'saine' and 'supérieure'.⁶¹

⁶⁰ 'La marche en avant de l'histoire, loin de se confondre avec un naïf progrès, obéit à des forces obscures, et ne se fait ni sans crises, ni sans victimes. L'humanité, comme le train, avance dans les ténèbres, et la seule certitude qu'elle puisse avoir est celle du caractère inéluctable de ce mouvement' (Jacques Noiray, 'De *La Bête humaine* à *Lourdes*, ou un train peut en cacher un autre', in *Glasgow Colloque*, pp.209-224, p.216).

⁶¹ In the grip of despair over his personal life, Pascal throws himself into his work: 'On aurait dit qu'une rage l'avait saisi de se convaincre de la légitimité de ses espoirs, de forcer la science à lui donner la certitude que l'humanité pouvait être refaite, saine enfin et supérieure' (*Pascal* 1029). It is important to see how Pascal looks towards science to confirm the belief he already has from 'la vie'. His desires echo the objectives he once held about his medical developments: 'donnant de la force, de la santé et de la volonté, referait une humanité toute neuve et supérieure' (949). Later, as we saw above, Pascal abandons these plans of intervention in the course of nature. As he confesses to Clotilde: "'Corriger la nature, intervenir, la modifier et la contrarier dans son but, est-ce une besogne louable? Guérir, retarder la mort de l'être pour son agrément personnel, le prolonger pour le dommage de

The effort invested will result in control and power. In a close parallel with *Pascal* where power will come from increased knowledge and understanding, power here is associated with control over the earth (and perhaps, the planet?) which evokes *Terre* and the efforts of the peasants to make the land produce more for them. The connection which Mme Caroline makes between this movement and progress is a useful one to bear in mind, not least of all as it underlines the idea of a movement towards a goal, a goal which usually represents an improved state of affairs.

It is Mme Caroline, however, who identifies (in a single word over ten thousand pages) the crux of the thesis. At the end of *Argent* having accepted Saccard's viewpoint on the power of money, she looks beyond the immediate cost of the crash of the Banque Universelle, extrapolating into a more general pronouncement on this movement forwards (perhaps at any cost) towards a better future:

Mon Dieu! au-dessus de tant de boue remuée, au-dessus de tant de victimes écrasées, de toute cette abominable souffrance que coûte à l'humanité chaque pas en avant, n'y a-t-il pas un but obscur et lointain, quelque chose de supérieur, de bon, de juste, de définitif, auquel nous allons sans le savoir et qui nous gonfle le cœur de l'obstiné besoin de vivre et d'espérer?⁶²

This passage identifies some of the characteristics of the 'but ignoré' - it is an improvement on the current state of events, and it is 'bon'. 'Définitif' seems to suggest that the goal will put an end to the quest, that the state is an absolute one. Note also how the promise of this end serves as a spur for optimism and continued commitment to 'la vie'. Most importantly for us, and a single word on which so much rests, it is 'juste'. This passage appears to identify the 'but ignoré' as the repository of justice.

l'espèce sans doute, n'est-ce pas défaire ce que veut faire la nature? Et rêver une humanité plus saine, plus forte, modelée sur notre idée de la santé et de la force, en avons-nous le droit?" (*Pascal* 1084). He decides not.

⁶² *Argent* 398. A less direct reference is made earlier as Mme Caroline reflects on the source of her hope: 'Voilà donc qu'une de ses grandes crises était encore passée, elle espérait de nouveau, quoi? elle n'en savait toujours rien, l'éternel inconnu qui était au bout de la vie, au bout de l'humanité. Vivre, cela devait suffire, pour que la vie lui apportât sans cesse la guérison des blessures que la vie lui faisait' (226). Her references to suffering, although of a more metaphorical quality than Pascal's medical interest is worth noting. Just as he accepted, on his death bed, the necessity of suffering, she appears to see it as part of the deal.

That justice exists in this future state is also suggested by Clotilde's reflections about the destiny of the 'enfant inconnu' at the end of *Pascal* :

Que serait-il, quand elle l'aurait fait grand et fort, en se donnant toute? Un savant qui enseignerait au monde un peu de la vérité éternelle, un capitaine qui apporterait de la gloire à son pays, ou mieux encore un de ces pasteurs de peuple qui apaisent les passions et font régner la justice?⁶³

A veritable messianism attaches to this unnamed child.⁶⁴ Discussing Jules Lemaître's assessment of *Œuvre*, Henri Guillemin informs us that the earlier critic identified a presence in each of the novels in the cycle of representatives of hope.⁶⁵ The 'enfant inconnu' thus fits into a series of such characters. In language evocative of the Bible, Guillemin also observes that : 'après la dénonciation, le temps est venu de l'annonciation' (*ibid.*, p.177).

Brian Nelson places the 'enfant inconnu' in a series of social messiahs in the cycle. 'Early prototypes of the messiah are social adventurers and figures of power' and he identifies characters such as Aristide Saccard, Eugène Rougon, Octave Mouret and the abbé Faujas, each one a 'remarkable individualist' with 'an obsessive will to power and a ruthless determination to survive and succeed' (Nelson, *Bourgeoisie*, p.25). Claudie Bernard attributes an historical aspect and political dimension to the infant:

Il représente la Vie, la Vie au potentiel illimité d'innovation : 'l'inconnu' auquel les connaissances biologiques doivent faire la place. En outre, jeune comme la République, et de sexe masculin, il incarne le devenir historique.⁶⁶

⁶³ *Pascal* 1218. Will he construct the 'cité de justice'? (1219).

⁶⁴ She recognises that all mothers wonder if their offspring is the 'messie attendu' (*Pascal* 1218). Clotilde speculates on whether he will be the 'messie que le prochain siècle attendait' (1219). She considers the possibility that he could equally be the Antichrist. E. Gingell remarks: 'The union of Pascal and Clotilde not only violates almost every convention of society, but would seem the most unlikely to produce healthy offspring. They are uncle and niece of a family cursed by the hereditary taints of insanity and alcoholism' ('The theme of fertility in Zola's *Rougon-Macquart*', *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 13 (1977), 350-358, p.356).

⁶⁵ '[Lemaître] avait signalé, en 1886, la présence obstinée, dans chaque volume des *Rougon-Macquart*, de quelqu'un, si noir que fût l'ouvrage, un être au moins, chargé par Zola de représenter l'espérance, chaque fois, ou, un être noble, au moins, une créature d'innocence ou de bonté, depuis Miette et Silvère de *La Fortune des Rougon* jusqu'au petit Jacques de *L'Œuvre*, en passant par Florent du *Ventre de Paris*, Lalie Bijard de *L'Assommoir*, Pauline surtout dans *La Joie de vivre*' ('Zola et le sens de son œuvre', *Europe*, 468-469 (1968), 169-178, p.176).

⁶⁶ 'Cercle familial et cycle romanesque dans *Le Docteur Pascal*', *CN*, 67 (1993), 123-140 (p.126). She adds : 'Leur enfant est deux fois Rougon, deux fois de la branche légitime - mais deux fois illégitimement : produit et de l'inceste et du concubinage' (*ibid.*). Axel Preiss also identifies : 'ce faux

The fact that the objective is 'ignoré' and that humanity moves towards it 'sans le savoir' is not fatal. Much earlier in *Argent* the idea of 'l'inconnu' is suggested - along with the hint that the lack of definition of the final goal is compensated for by its positive aura, as Mme Caroline explains to Saccard and Hamelin:

'[J]e ne sais plus du tout où je vais, pas plus, d'ailleurs, que ce vaste monde ne le sait lui-même. Seulement, c'est malgré moi, il me semble que je vais, que nous allons tous à quelque chose de très bien et de parfaitement gai.' (*Argent* 74)

Winston R. Hewitt identifies in Zola's *Mes Haines* an early version of this belief, with a religious quality to it.⁶⁷ In Hewitt's view, Pascal's optimism sees the removal of God from the picture and the substitution of another series of beliefs:

Herein lies the point of departure for, and central to, the author's final works. Repeatedly Zola counsels man to place his faith and confidence in work, in life and in nature. And it is precisely this multi-faceted faith that leads Zola to reassure his readers that, though the naturalists are determinists, they are neither fatalistic nor pessimistic about the future.⁶⁸

As we shall see in the section below, work and confidence in nature are the cornerstones of the creed of 'la vie' - the alternative religion established by Pascal and practised, unknowingly yet instinctively, by the female porte-paroles.

inceste aboutit à l'enfant sans prénom en qui l'on doit voir un Messie chargé d'annoncer une 'bonne nouvelle', un évangile' ('Pascal, ou la biodicée médicale', *CN*, 57 (1983), 116-131, p.116).

⁶⁷ Hewitt quotes p.107 of the Bernouard edition. 'Avancer d'un pas la création vers le but inconnu. Il y a je ne sais quelle grandeur, quelle paix suprême, quelle joie profonde, dans cette idée que Dieu travaille en nous, que nous préparons la terre et l'être de demain, que nous sommes un enfantement et qu'au dernier jour nous assisterons, avec l'univers entier, à l'achèvement de l'œuvre' (*Through those living pillars: man and nature in the works of Emile Zola* (The Hague and Paris: Mouton, 1974), pp.132-133).

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p.140.

Patterns of imagery and structure

The concept of the movement towards a new order is supported in the novels by patterns of imagery. One very important and oft-repeated image in *Les Rougon-Macquart* is that of compost, muck and manure. It features more than once in a literal sense in *Terre*, but it is its metaphorical potential which interests us here. The references fall into two categories, the first negative and associated with the Second Empire, and the second positive and associated with the dawn of a new era, closely linked to the harvest imagery which we shall discuss below. The link between manure and harvest on the metaphorical level is the same as on the horticultural. 'Fumier' is frequently associated with the Second Empire, which is, for Zola, a negative connotation. A good example is Nana who was associated with manure in *Assommoir* and who becomes the 'mouche d'or' in *Nana*.⁶⁹ In *Argent* there is a reference to 'le terreau impérial, fait de débris en fermentation' (*Argent* 170) which makes another explicit connection between manure and the regime.

The use of the image in a positive sense, as the necessary but unwholesome sacrifices required for a better future, is more prevalent in the novels, especially as the cycle of *Les Rougon-Macquart* draws to a close. Winston R. Hewitt discusses the relationship between degeneration and regeneration, identifying the former as necessary for the latter.⁷⁰ On the 'theme of catastrophe as the necessary agent of renewal', Brian Nelson states:

Zola describes a world full of violence, horror and apocalyptic disasters; the emergence of his myth of regenerative optimism depends, indeed, on a

⁶⁹ In the earlier novel, the concierge refers to Nana and her little friends in the following terms : 'Boche disait que les enfants poussaient sur la misère comme des champignons sur le fumier' (*Assommoir* 520). Identical imagery is used in Mme Caroline's visit to the slums of the cité de Naples where the young residents are described as 'pauvres êtres poussés sur ce fumier ainsi que des champignons véreux' (*Argent* 149). The famous representation in *Nana* builds on the same imagery : 'Elle avait poussé dans un faubourg, sur le pavé parisien; et, grande, belle, de chair superbe ainsi qu'une plante de plein fumier, elle vengeait les gueux et les abandonnés dont elle était le produit' (*Nana* 1269).

⁷⁰ 'Death is merely a rite of passage in the evolutionary processes of the universe. Death and destruction are transitory, not final. Transmuted, they germinate into regeneration and reconstruction, the optimistic note that sounds at the end of such generally pessimistic novels as *Germinal*, *L'Argent* and *La Débâcle*' (Hewitt, *Living Pillars*, p.140).

progressive multiplication of symbolic catastrophes, which are accompanied by increasingly explicit hope in their purifying potential. (Nelson, *Bourgeoisie*, p.36)

The examples from *Argent* in the following paragraphs show this positive interpretation of the manure imagery, casting manure as the fertile ground for the birth of a new social order. It is associated with the harvest image which is perhaps the most consistent example of the symbolic use of natural imagery in the novels.

Connected with those key elements of renewal and renaissance, this image dominates the closing passages of several of the later novels in the series.

The narrative of *Terre*, for example, is sandwiched between opening and closing scenes of the sowing of seed. The novel as a whole is intimately connected with the natural cycle, the passage of the seasons, the routine of preparing the soil, sowing the seed, nurturing the plant and then harvesting the fruit. *Germinal*, as its title suggests, is rich in imagery associated with sowing, germinating, flowering and harvesting.⁷¹

The image of seeds germinating into new and powerful life is developed throughout the novel. As the novel progresses, this new and powerful life takes on a particular shape, namely a new generation of workers, an army in fact, which will challenge the forces of capital, and, more significantly, work towards justice:

Mais, à présent, le mineur s'éveillait au fond, germait dans la terre ainsi qu'une vraie graine; et l'on verrait un matin ce qu'il pousserait au beau milieu des champs : oui, il pousserait des hommes, une armée d'hommes qui rétabliraient la justice. (*Germinal* 1277)

Given that the novel focusses on subterranean life in the mine-shaft, it is particularly apt to use the image of germination - a process which occurs underground. It is important to note in the passage above how justice is associated with the end of the cycle of germination. It is worth noting the consistency of the imagery in this novel, the connection made between the germination of an army, and the movement towards a new world order. The implication of this pattern of imagery and its association of social change with the natural cycle appears to be that regardless of the time frame involved, there is ultimately a certainty as to result.

⁷¹ For example : 'une rébellion germait dans ce coin étroit' (*Germinal* 1184), 'un sourd mécontentement fermentait dans la fosse' (1250) and 'les idées semées par Etienne poussaient' (1292).

The image of a harvest and a new world order is also used in *Argent*. The ground has already been prepared for a rash of speculation.⁷² All sorts of dodgy businesses have sprung up in this environment.⁷³ Investment sows the seeds for a new future:

Déjà la moisson des hommes et des grandes choses futures était semée, tout germait, ce serait avant quelques années un monde nouveau. (*Argent* 223)

The connection is made very clearly in this novel between the images of harvest and manure. Already suggested in 'terreau impérial', the link becomes apparent in the analogy made first by Mme Caroline between money (a key concept in the novel, as reflected in the title) and manure.⁷⁴ Both are dirty and in some way unwholesome, but she accepts them as a necessary evil, and with such a super end result in sight, it is worth getting one's (green?) fingers dirty:

L'argent, empoisonneur et destructeur, devenait le ferment de toute végétation sociale, servait de terreau nécessaire aux grands travaux dont l'exécution rapprocherait les peuples et pacifierait la terre.⁷⁵

It is an image to which Saccard returns as he defends his actions to Mme Caroline who has presented him with the tally of the victims of the crash of the Banque Universelle:

[D]éjà la vie affluait de partout, le sol de l'antique berceau venait d'être ensemencé d'une nouvelle moisson d'hommes, le progrès de demain y grandirait, avec une vigueur de végétation extraordinaire, dans ce merveilleux climat, sous les grands soleils. N'y avait-il pas là le réveil d'un monde, l'humanité élargie et plus heureuse? (*Argent* 398)

⁷² 'Le terrain était préparé, le terreau impérial, fait de débris en fermentation, chauffé des appétits exaspérés, extrêmement favorable à une de ces poussées folles de la spéculation' (*Argent* 170).

⁷³ 'Déjà, les sociétés véreuses naissaient comme des champignons' (*Argent* 171). This image is repeated, again in connection with the 'entreprises louches' which sprang up at the same time as Saccard's Banque Universelle, 'grandies comme des champignons monstrueux dans le terreau décomposé du règne' (315).

⁷⁴ 'Alors, Mme Caroline eut la brusque conviction que l'argent était le fumier dans lequel poussait cette humanité de demain' (*Argent* 224).

⁷⁵ *Argent* 224-225. Almost identical terminology is used in the concluding paragraphs of the novel: 'Il avait raison: l'argent, jusqu'à ce jour, était le fumier dans lequel poussait l'humanité de demain; l'argent, empoisonneur et destructeur, devenait le ferment de toute végétation sociale, le terreau nécessaire aux grands travaux qui facilitaient l'existence' (398).

The repetition of the image of social vegetation could be seen to suggest that a new society will develop in an organic fashion, perhaps with little human guidance, which would connect it to Pascal's favouring of evolution over revolution. After all, the whole germination image suggests a process and a cycle rather than the upheaval of a rupture. In this sense, the imagery parallels the concept of the movement towards the 'but ignoré'.

There is a structural pattern in the novels towards the end of *Les Rougon-Macquart* which supports this promise of a better future. This idea of a renaissance or a new beginning is underlined by the apocalyptic endings of the later novels and the potential for rebirth. *Germinal* must also be considered in this light. Henri Mitterand identifies an article from Zola's journalism (on Chateaubriand) which shares the optimistic flavour of the ending of that novel:

Pourquoi ne pas avoir foi dans la vie, dans l'humanité? [...] Il n'y a aucune raison pour croire au mal final; au contraire, lorsque la somme des efforts est faite, on constate toujours dans l'histoire un pas de plus en avant, malgré les erreurs de route. Marchons donc, mettons notre certitude dans l'avenir. Quand même, demain aura raison.⁷⁶

This pattern of endings has been the subject of much critical attention, and for our purposes a brief survey will suffice. Guy Robert summarises the pattern as follows:

Comme *Germinal*, comme *La Terre*, comme *L'Argent*, *Le Docteur Pascal* et, avec ce roman, le cycle entier, s'achèvent par une méditation sereine et confiante, celle de Clotilde allaitant son enfant. Après les morts et les ruines, le travail reprend, les fécondités dispensent à nouveau leurs promesses et l'avenir propose déjà sa venue, lumineuse, chargée pourtant de mystères, et aussi de menaces.⁷⁷

We have already seen the optimism and hope of Mme Caroline in spite of the catastrophic effect of the crash of the Banque Universelle at the end of *Argent*. This is an echo of Etienne's confidence as he leaves Montsou at the end of *Germinal*.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ RM III 1822.

⁷⁷ Robert, *Emile Zola*, p.124.

⁷⁸ Melvin Zimmerman suggests that the optimism lies in the harmonious relationship between man and nature established by the imagery: 'Le dernier mouvement du livre se caractérise par une harmonie profonde et rude de forces irrésistibles, le chant de l'homme, le chant de la terre qui vont crescendo, résonnant longtemps après que l'on a tourné la dernière page. Zola insiste sur ce concept de l'homme-

Whereas the ending of *Bête* promises an inexorable movement towards a future, the ending of *Débâcle* - 'la vie grondait encore' (*Débâcle* 911) - gives a more optimistic flavour to that future, entrusting it into the reliable hands of Jean Macquart, who was also present at the inferno which marked the end of *Terre*. Sandy Petrey sees the Second Empire and the Commune as obstacles to nature's evolutionary progress:

Comme l'Empire, la Commune représenterait une maladie dont la France peut guérir, une entrave qui a momentanément empêché l'évolution désirable et désirée de suivre son cours. Les feux purificateurs de la Commune étaient nécessaires pour redonner la France à la nature, qui en revanche créera une nation saine, forte et invincible.⁷⁹

Commenting on the conclusion to *Débâcle* Sylvie Thorel-Cailleteau observes a pattern:

Cette description est scandée par la répétition de la nécessité d'une destruction universelle, afin que surgisse un ordre nouveau; on retrouve ainsi d'autres dénouements zoliens, tout particulièrement celui de *Germinal*, différemment orchestrés ici.⁸⁰

Alfred C. Proulx identifies a 'refrain optimiste' in the seven last novels:

Des sept derniers romans de la série, cinq se terminent sur un frappant passage de lyrisme optimiste, et les deux autres sur une note d'espoir. Ces derniers romans expriment tous une confiance dans l'avenir.⁸¹

This in spite of the catastrophic events of the novels, to which Jacques Noiray alludes: 'l'idée d'une violence nécessaire, le progrès ne pouvant naître que d'un cataclysme.'⁸²

In his analysis of the novels' endings, Colin Boswell identifies a pattern of 'closure in which the discourse ends on a note of hope' but speculates as to whether or not the endings allow an optimistic interpretation of the works as a whole:

dans-la-nature : notamment sur les correspondances plus ou moins exactes entre les actions et les saisons' ('L'homme et la nature dans *Germinal*', CN, 44 (1972), 212-218, p.213).

⁷⁹ 'La République de *La Débâcle*', CN, 54 (1980), 87-95 (p.93).

⁸⁰ 'A propos de *La Débâcle*', CN, 67 (1993), 57-62 (p.62).

⁸¹ *Aspects épiques des "Rougon-Macquart" de Zola* (The Hague and Paris: Mouton, 1966), p.24. He also sees optimism in the ending of a much earlier novel in the series: '*Son Excellence Eugène Rougon* est le roman optimiste par excellence. Nous pourrions voir trembler la fortune d'Eugène, nous pourrions même prédire sa chute éventuelle du pouvoir, mais le roman s'achève sur sa victoire. Il reste le maître absolu de la situation' (p.116).

⁸² Noiray, *Glasgow Colloque*, p.222.

They may also call into question an optimistic reading of the texts. The note of hope in *La Faute de l'abbé Mouret* is pronounced by a sub-normal child. The optimistic endings of *La Terre* and *La Débâcle* depend on the reader accepting the inevitability of war as a social counterpart to the survival of the fittest in Darwin's theory of evolution.⁸³

Colin Boswell offers just such a reading of the end of *Germinal*.⁸⁴ He concludes by reminding us 'that Zola's "parting shots" are but part of the story'.⁸⁵ The optimistic interpretation of these patterns of structures and imagery in the novels complements the optimism clearly associated with Pascal and the female porte-parole characters. It is central to their belief in 'la vie', and their contribution towards the movement in the texts which, whatever it is called, leads towards the 'but ignoré', which, as we saw above, is a repository of justice.

Creed of 'la vie'

Je voudrais, dans ce roman, ne pas conclure au dégoût de la vie (pessimisme). La vie telle qu'elle est, mais acceptée, malgré tout, pour l'amour d'elle-même, dans sa force. Ce que je voudrais, en somme, qu'il sortît de toute ma série des *Rougon-Macquart*.⁸⁶

One aspect of the revolutionary characters which is also exhibited by this group is the enunciation (by Pascal) and adherence to (Pascal and the female porte-paroles) an alternative religion. Whereas the revolutionaries had justice as their sole objective,

⁸³ Colin Boswell, 'Zola's parting shots', in *Craft of Fiction*, pp.112-132, p.129 and p.130.

⁸⁴ 'The end of *Germinal* could be interpreted, on account of Zola's use of free indirect speech, as Etienne's attempt to justify to himself his leaving Montsou for Paris, since he is walking away from a situation which he has helped to create, leaving the miners who remain alive in a measurably worse position than they were when he arrived' (Boswell, *Craft of Fiction*, p.130). Alfred C. Proulx, however, observes discernible grounds for hope behind the ruins at the end of *Germinal*: 'L'avenir est encore inconnu, mais il est en opposition nette avec le présent en décomposition' (Proulx, *Aspects épiques*, p.118).

⁸⁵ Boswell, *Craft of Fiction*, p.130. In her article 'Les dénouements dans *Les Rougon-Macquart*' (*Romantisme*, 61 (1988), 85-94) Anne Belgrand, like Boswell, makes clear that the endings are only part of the novels. Claiming that the series would have become monotonous without the positive endings, she concedes that 'il paraît dans un premier temps bien difficile de conclure à un pessimisme ou à un optimisme de Zola à travers ces dénouements' (p.92), she identifies a progressive movement: 'Certes, il est incontestable que le mouvement des *Rougon-Macquart*, nettement souligné par la fin des différents romans considérés, marque une progression vers l'avenir' (p.93).

⁸⁶ *Ebauche of L'Argent*. Cited by Halina Suwala (*Miscellanées Mitterand*, p.40). Philip Walker observes: 'L'Argent (1891) ends on the word life. So does *Pascal* (1893) and consequently the whole *Rougon-Macquart* series' ('*Germinal*' and Zola's philosophical and religious thought (Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 1984), p.34).

we shall see that this group has a wider and less specific objective in mind - namely the 'but ignoré' to which they believe 'la vie' will lead them.

A term much employed by Pascal in his statements of principle and expressions of faith is 'la vie'. The relationship between this term and 'nature' (or even 'Nature') seems a close one. There does not seem to be much which comes under the jurisdiction of nature which falls outwith that of 'la vie'. His direct references to nature are limited in *Pascal* to a number of mentions of 'lois naturelles'⁸⁷ and to occasions where 'la vie' could have been used interchangeably. For example, when he summarises his views to his young colleague Ramond, Pascal concludes: 'Et moi qui crois, au fond, que l'unique sagesse est de ne pas intervenir, de laisser faire la nature!'⁸⁸

This appears to confirm at least a high degree of identification between 'la vie' and nature, which is also suggested in the important conversation in the garden. Clotilde uses 'la vie' and 'la nature' in a way which suggests a possible interpretation that 'la vie' is the life force which runs through nature.

'Si encore l'égalité et la justice existaient dans ta nature. Mais tu le reconnais toi-même, la vie est au plus fort, le faible périt fatalement, parce qu'il est faible.'
(*Pascal* 993)

Clotilde uses the term 'nature' in response to a long speech by Pascal built around the word 'vie', suggesting, if not their interchangeability, then their intimate connection.

The key element of Pascal's credo is the cult of 'la vie'. Whilst his views on the role of science and medicine fluctuate, this element remains constant throughout the novel.

⁸⁷ There is a reference to the 'lois naturelles' which he and Clotilde agree would be infringed by sexual intercourse without conception in view (*Pascal* 1086). He also has 'la certitude que toute révolte contre les lois naturelles est mauvaise' (1164). This notion of laws is seen elsewhere in his research into heredity. He wants to establish '[q]uelles étaient les lois de la vie' (944), and Pascal 'voulait en [hérité] fixer les lois pour disposer d'elle, et refaire un monde heureux' (1022). 'Une joie de savant s'était emparée du docteur, devant cette œuvre de vingt années, où se trouvaient appliquées, si nettement et si complètement, les lois de l'hérédité, fixées par lui' (1006). Explicit references to nature are absent in the other novels in which Pascal features.

⁸⁸ *Pascal* 1178. When he discusses the important role for animality in 'une histoire de la vie', Clotilde observes her uncle and notices how: 'Il s'était peu à peu excité, il en arrivait à la confession de sa foi, au labeur continu et victorieux de la nature vivante' (*Pascal* 1020).

En somme, le docteur Pascal n'avait qu'une croyance, la croyance à la vie. La vie était l'unique manifestation divine. La vie, c'était Dieu, le grand moteur, l'âme de l'univers.⁸⁹

The use of terminology such as 'croyance', 'divine' and 'Dieu' underlines the status of the creed of 'la vie' as an alternative religion. For him 'la vie' exhibits all the qualities of a god - perfection, power and immortality.⁹⁰ Yves Malinas observes:

Ce mode de pensée 'déiste' à forte teinture de christianisme est fort éloigné d'une démarche 'scientifique'. La foi dans la science, dans la vie, dans le concours du mal au succès final du bien, l'espérance dans la rédemption et la charité pour ceux qui se débattent dans la réalité du siècle, sont des vertus théologiques majeurs mais de piètres arguments scientifiques.⁹¹

'La vie' is cyclical and eternal.⁹² The essential requirement is to live and love life. Pascal tells Clotilde to try and understand 'la vie' and lead her life as 'la vie' appears to dictate:

'Connais donc la vie, aime-la, vis-la telle qu'elle doit être vécue : il n'y a pas d'autre sagesse.'⁹³

As we saw earlier, Pascal's career falls into two halves, the first is his period of unmitigated confidence in science and its role in the creation of a new world order, a scenario in which the 'médecin guérisseur' intervenes in nature ('la vie') and determines its direction, stamping out bad genes, prolonging life and so forth, through his 'alchimie du vingtième siècle'.⁹⁴ A crisis of faith in science leads to a more

⁸⁹ *Pascal* 947. 'Ce culte de la vie aboutit à une sorte de panthéisme qui met en évidence la merveille de la nature, où chaque objet a une âme répandue partout' (Kellner, *Pascal*, p.182).

⁹⁰ 'La vie impeccable, la vie toute-puissante, la vie immortelle!' (*Pascal* 1085).

⁹¹ Malinas, *Zola et les hérités imaginaires*, p.192.

⁹² 'La vie est éternelle, elle ne fait jamais que recommencer et s'accroître' (*Pascal* 962).

⁹³ *Pascal* 992. He tells her that : "[L]e seul intérêt à vivre est de croire à la vie, de l'aimer et de mettre toutes les forces de son intelligence à la mieux connaître" (986-987).

⁹⁴ "Corriger la nature, intervenir, la modifier et la contrarier dans son but, est-ce une besogne louable? Guérir, retarder la mort de l'être pour son agrément personnel, le prolonger pour le dommage de l'espèce sans doute, n'est-ce pas défaire ce que veut faire la nature? Et rêver une humanité plus saine, plus forte, modelée sur notre idée de la santé et de la force, en avons-nous le droit? Qu'allons-nous faire là, de quoi allons-nous nous mêler dans ce labeur de la vie, dont les moyens et le but nous sont inconnus? Peut-être tout est-il bien. Peut-être risquons-nous de tuer l'amour, le génie, la vie elle-même ... Tu entends, je le confesse à toi seule, le doute m'a pris, je tremble à la pensée de mon alchimie du vingtième siècle, je finis par croire qu'il est plus grand et plus sain de laisser l'évolution s'accomplir" (*Pascal* 1084).

humble and modest approach in which the 'médecin philosophe' collaborates with 'la vie', taking his lead from it. As he explains to Clotilde:

'Ne comprends-tu pas que vouloir tout guérir, tout régénérer, c'est une ambition fausse de notre égoïsme, une révolte contre la vie, que nous déclarons mauvaise, parce que nous la jugeons au point de vue de notre intérêt?'⁹⁵

He accepts that the ways of 'la vie' are misty and intervention is dangerous in the absence of real knowledge.⁹⁶ He expresses his confidence in the life force and identifies his objective to be the study of 'la vie' so that he can live according to her rules, rather than attempting to impose his authority on her:

'C'est ma passion de la vie qui triomphe, jusqu'à ne pas la chicaner sur son but, jusqu'à me confier totalement, à me perdre en elle, sans vouloir la refaire, selon ma conception du bien et du mal. Elle seule est souveraine, elle seule sait ce qu'elle fait et où elle va, je ne puis que m'efforcer de la connaître, pour la vivre comme elle demande à être vécue...' (*Pascal* 1085)

It is a question of a collaboration (and not of equals - man is secondary to nature), which Guy Robert describes as 'coopérer par le travail à l'œuvre bienfaisante de la nature.'⁹⁷ It is a question of belief followed by active commitment which shall be rewarded by 'bonheur'.

Ce bonheur, l'homme a-t-il à le mériter? Il ne le conquerra qu'à force de lucidité et de labeur. A force de lucidité, parce que l'homme doit exorciser les faux dieux et comprendre qu'il ne peut être de réalité suprême hors de la Nature; à force de travail, parce qu'il doit, pour sa part, aider la Nature dans l'accomplissement de sa grande œuvre de vie.⁹⁸

Rather than interfering with nature, the key is to make contributions from within our realm of competence. For Pascal, as a doctor, the alleviation of suffering would be just such a contribution.⁹⁹

⁹⁵ *Pascal* 1085. The 'point de vue de notre intérêt' is echoed in 'ma conception du bien et du mal' (*ibid.*), and in 'notre idée de la santé et de la force' (1084) which emphasize the notion of a limited viewpoint, as opposed to 'la vie' and her commanding view over the Big Picture. Emphasis mine.

⁹⁶ "'Qu'allons-nous faire là, de quoi allons-nous nous mêler dans ce labeur de la vie, dont les moyens et le but nous sont inconnus?'" (*Pascal* 1084).

⁹⁷ Robert, *Emile Zola*, p.178.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.110-111.

⁹⁹ For a more detailed account of Pascal's changing attitude to suffering and the associated notion of stoicism, see Kellner, *Pascal*, p.165ff.

Oui, oui! recommencer la vie et savoir la vivre, bêcher la terre, étudier le monde, aimer la femme, arriver à la perfection humaine, à la cité future de l'universel bonheur, par le juste emploi de l'être entier, quel beau testament laisserait là un médecin philosophe! (*Pascal* 1159)

Although expressed in similar terminology to his earlier statement of principle, Pascal's focus appears to have shifted from theoretical and scientific developments to a more active and practical approach. There remains scope for study ('étudier') but it is on an equal footing with physical labour ('bêcher') and loving - in short, the 'juste emploi de l'être entier', a combination of mental and physical activity which perhaps eluded Pascal.¹⁰⁰ Once again, the key appears to be balance and moderation.

Pauline has 'un amour de la vie, qui débordait chaque jour davantage' (*Joie* 856) and which she tries, in vain, to transmit to those around her: 'elle tâchait de donner à Lazare de son courage, en lui faisant aimer la vie' (1000). The title of the novel is not without significance.¹⁰¹

Pauline's interest in anatomy and in the physiology of menstruation is related to her attitude towards 'la vie':

C'était la vie acceptée, la vie aimée dans ses fonctions, sans dégoût ni peur, et saluée par la chanson triomphante de la santé. (*Joie* 857)

Once she understands the reasons behind the physical changes she undergoes in puberty, 'elle acceptait sans fièvre la floraison de la vie, ce lent épanouissement de

¹⁰⁰ Did Pascal ever arrive at a balance between his work - his medical and scientific research - and his love life and the fulfilling of his biological imperative to procreate? During the idyll following the consummation of their relationship, neither he nor Clotilde does much in the way of work, and work is used as a pretext to end their togetherness. Clotilde is sent away to care for her sickly brother Maxime, and Pascal throws himself back into his scientific research. In the final analysis, he achieves both, though consecutively rather than concurrently. As Colette Becker remarks: 'Pascal, qui s'était laissé dévorer par le travail dans un premier temps, meurt, dévoré par la vie, et avec lui son œuvre. [...] Il est, comme Claude, avant lui, ou Sandoz, confronté au douloureux dilemme: ou le Travail, ou la Vie' ('Comment refaire du bonheur avec cela', in *Centenary Colloquium*, pp.49-55, p.53).

¹⁰¹ Zola considered nine possible titles before making his choice. In the notes to the *Pléiade* edition, Henri Mitterand identifies the others as coming from Zola's reading around Schopenhauer. They include *La vallée de larmes*, *L'espoir du néant*, *La sombre mort*, *Le tourment de l'existence* and *La misère du monde* (*RM* III 1775). Note how he chose one with a positive connotation, and one sufficiently ambiguous to be open to an ironic interpretation. Critics seem divided on this question of irony. E. Gingell makes the case for a straight reading: 'Some critics have suggested that the title is a piece of dark irony on Zola's part, but I think it must be taken at its face value' (*FMLS* 13 (1977), p.352).

son corps' (*Joie* 875). This love of life is highlighted by Ida-Marie Frandon as the essence of the novel.¹⁰² Pauline's understanding of 'la vie' is closely connected to procreation, from which stems her regret that her fertility is not being fully exploited.¹⁰³

In *Argent*, Hamelin tells his sister : "tu es l'amour de la vie" (*Argent* 74). She has a 'courage à vivre extraordinaire' (60) and a 'bravoure à vivre' (65). Associated with Mme Caroline is the 'force de vivre, cette impulsion qui fait de la vie une nécessité et une joie' (67). The term 'existence' is also similarly used in the novel - for example when she explains to her brother and Saccard her apparent inability to be sad : "Voici que l'existence me reprend, je ris aujourd'hui, demain j'espérerai, je voudrai vivre encore, vivre toujours..." (73).

Aware as she is of both the good and the bad in life, her advice is to shift the focus from the negative to the positive.¹⁰⁴ Her positive attitude is an example : 'la vie, qu'elle acceptait d'habitude si gaillardement, même mauvaise' (61). Saccard's defence of speculation, constructed on the risqué analogy between sex and investment, convinces Mme Caroline up to a point:

Mme Caroline s'était décidée à rire, elle aussi; car elle n'avait point de prudence. 'Alors,' dit-elle, 'votre conclusion est qu'il faut s'y résigner, puisque cela est dans le plan de la nature ... Vous avez raison, la vie n'est pas propre.'¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² 'Ce qui fait, nous semble-t-il, malgré l'affreuse réalité qu'elle présente parfois, la grandeur et la beauté de cette œuvre, ce qui la domine, c'est l'amour de la vie, d'une vie saine, équilibrée, en harmonie avec les forces naturelles, amour tel qu'il impose des devoirs envers soi-même comme envers autrui, et qu'il met au cœur foi et espérance' ('Valeurs durables dans l'œuvre de Zola', *CN*, 5 (1956), 213-218, p.214). She also comments that 'Zola incarne volontiers cet amour de la vie dans la jeune fille ou la jeune femme' (*ibid.*). In *Argent*, at thirty-five, Mme Caroline also qualifies as a 'jeune femme', whose face is youthful as is her spirit, in spite of her halo of prematurely white hair.

¹⁰³ 'Elle voulait vivre, et vivre complètement, faire de la vie, elle qui aimait la vie! A quoi bon être, si l'on ne donne pas son être?' (*Joie* 1044).

¹⁰⁴ "Il me semble, à moi, qu'il y a des gens si tristes, qui ne sont jamais gais, qui se rendent la vie impossible, tellement ils se la peignent en noir ... Oh! ce n'est pas que je m'abuse sur la douceur et la beauté qu'elle offre. Elle a été trop dure, je l'ai trop vue de près, partout et librement. Elle est exécutable, quand elle n'est pas ignoble. Mais, que voulez-vous! je l'aime. Pourquoi? je n'en sais rien" (*Argent* 73-74).

¹⁰⁵ *Argent* 136. Saccard told her : "Ah! dame! il y a beaucoup de saletés inutiles, mais certainement le monde finirait sans elles" (*ibid.*).

So, 'résignation' will do, but 'amour' is surely better.¹⁰⁶ And Mme Caroline goes perhaps one step further with her active faith in the life-force. After her sexual relationship with Saccard is reported, she is described as follows:

[C]ette adorable femme, si jeune et si saine à trente-six ans, sous la neige de son épaisse chevelure blanche, d'un bon sens si brave et d'une sagesse si humaine, dans sa foi à la vie, telle qu'elle est, malgré la boue que le torrent emporte.
(*Argent* 163)

For the female porte-parole characters, 'la vie' appears respectively to be a force associated with progress and modernity (Denise), the life force with its biological imperative (Pauline and Clotilde) and simply a powerful movement forward towards a better future (Mme Caroline). They use different terms to refer to the movement which they perceive to be rolling along in the novels. 'Progrès' is one such term, and the parallels between it and 'la vie' are quite obvious, as we shall see. Symbolised by their relationships with key male figures (Octave Mouret, Lazare Chanteau, Aristide Saccard and Pascal Rougon) who themselves represent aspects of progress, the attitude of the female porte-parole characters towards progress is one which links them most closely as a group and which represents one of the most important aspects of their ideological function in the novels. In spite of the different spheres in which they live and about which they make their observations, a similar spirit of confidence in progress informs their attitude.

The cases of Mme Caroline and Denise are closely related, and are better than the examples of Pauline and Clotilde for our purposes here.¹⁰⁷ For Denise it is her relationship with Octave Mouret and her observation of modern commercial practices which form the basis of her ideas about progress. For Mme Caroline, her attachment to Aristide Saccard provides her with the opportunity to witness modern financial

¹⁰⁶ The idea of resignation is implicit when Mme Caroline reflects on the victims of the Banque Universelle's stock market crash: 'S'il n'y avait pas de consolation possible, ne faudrait-il pas vivre encore, vivre quand même?' (*Argent* 373).

¹⁰⁷ Pauline is pro-science and pro-medicine. Not persuaded of the utility of his musical endeavours, she encourages Lazare to consider medical studies, a career she would have undertaken had she been a man. "Ça ne sert à rien, ta musique," déclara carrément Pauline. "A ta place, je me ferais médecin" (*Joie* 840). 'Elle finissait par l'intéresser à la médecine, en lui expliquant que, si elle était un homme, ce qu'elle trouverait de plus passionnant, ce serait de guérir le monde' (842). Clotilde has always helped Pascal in an administrative and menial sense, and comes to share his philosophy and assists him more

practices and to develop an awareness of the potential of money from which stems her understanding of the shape of progress at the end of the nineteenth century. It also provides her with an opportunity to exhibit her moderation, which is identified by Brian Nelson as her major quality:

Mme Caroline thus represents the bourgeois ethic of moderation, the desirability of curbing Saccard's excesses and controlling his anarchic tendencies. Her rationality and sense of discipline counterpoint both the utopian dreams of Sigismond and the wild fantasies of Saccard. According to this interpretation, she embodies the values of organisation, stability and control.¹⁰⁸

Both women at various points in the respective novels love the men *because* of what they contribute to society, and also *in spite of* the effects of their actions on society. This ambivalence is important to note - as it exhibits both women's reasonable approach to life, inasmuch as they accept the good and the bad, even when they have to struggle to reconcile the two and identify the necessary relationship between them.

The extent to which Denise struggles to find a view which encompasses the good and the bad is clear from the following passage which features towards the end of the novel:

Mouret avait inventé cette mécanique à écraser le monde, dont le fonctionnement brutal l'indignait; il avait semé le quartier de ruines, dépouillé les uns, tué les autres; et elle l'aimait quand même pour la grandeur de son œuvre, elle l'aimait davantage à chacun des excès de son pouvoir, malgré le flot de larmes qui la soulevait, devant la misère sacrée des vaincus. (*Bonheur* 761)

The eponymous hero of *Bonheur* is the large department store developed by Octave Mouret, which functions as a metaphor for both progress and the life-force. Just as Mouret seduces Denise she is seduced by the store from the first time she sees it - it is love at first sight for Denise and this manifestation of progress. The contrast between the modern department store and the old-fashioned specialised shop run by Denise's

fully. Furthermore she collaborates with him on what is arguably their most important project - the 'enfant inconnu'.

¹⁰⁸ Nelson, *Bourgeoisie*, p.186.

uncle is established early in the novel and maintained throughout. She is instinctively repelled by one and attracted by the other.¹⁰⁹

It is not all plain sailing for Denise in her love affair with modern commerce. She is aware from early on in her relationship with the store that it is a machine. The notion of a machine has both positive and negative connotations - the positive ones including something which is well-run and efficient, the more negative ones relating to a lack of emotion or humanity, an automated entity with no appreciation of the effects of its actions - and Denise views the store as a machine in both these senses.¹¹⁰

N'allait-elle pas remettre la main à la machine qui écrasait le pauvre monde?
Mais elle se trouvait comme emportée par une force, elle sentait qu'elle ne
faisait pas le mal. (*Bonheur* 610)

In this particularly important passage she identifies a greater force at work, one which we shall suggest is progress. Note how she senses that it is a force for good, though she has no reason to believe so. Progress is linked in the novel to modern commerce, and Denise's equivocal response towards the machine which is the shop is reflected in her attitude towards modern commerce. Her response, like that of Mme Caroline as we saw at the end of *Argent*, is instinctive rather than intellectualised:

Elle était secrètement pour les grands magasins, dans son amour instinctif de la
logique et de la vie. (*Bonheur* 574)

She is quick to grasp the mood of the moment and to understand 'la puissance du nouveau commerce' (*Bonheur* 579) and at the appropriate juncture has the courage to

¹⁰⁹ The sight of the department store 'l'étourdissait et l'attirait; et il y avait, dans son désir d'y pénétrer, une peur vague qui achevait de la séduire. En même temps, la boutique de son oncle lui causait un sentiment de malaise. C'était un dédain irraisonné, une répugnance instinctive pour ce trou glacial de l'ancien commerce' (*Bonheur* 403). Denise, 'cédant à la séduction', goes out in the rain later that evening to look at the department store: 'A cette heure de nuit, avec son éclat de fournaise, le *Bonheur des Dames* achevait de la prendre tout entière. Dans la grande ville, noire et muette sous la pluie, dans ce Paris qu'elle ignorait, il flambait comme un phare, il semblait à lui seul la lumière et la vie de la cité' (414).

¹¹⁰ References in the text as a whole, however, tend to emphasise the frightening side of the monstrous machine, underlining the edifice's indifference towards those who work in it, against it, around it and also towards those who shop there. For example, 'le branle indifférent de la machine' (*Bonheur* 535), 'cette grande machine qui l'écraserait avec sa tranquille indifférence' (536). At Geneviève's funeral procession '[t]outes les victimes du monstre étaient là' (740), and as the cortège passes the department store 'le colosse gardait son indifférence de machine lancée à toute vapeur, inconsciente des morts qu'elle peut faire en chemin' (740), the last image foreshadowing the conclusion of *Bête*.

make her views known. When she meets Mouret in the Tuileries, for example, Denise 'laisa voir qu'elle était pour les grands magasins' (583), and she calmly expresses her opinion at Robineau's and to her uncle Baudu and his family, identifying the place of the department store in an ongoing process which will contribute to the happiness of the public:

Denise, posément, dit ses raisons, comme elle les disait chez Robineau: l'évolution logique du commerce, les nécessités des temps modernes, la grandeur de ces nouvelles créations, enfin le bien-être croissant du public. (*Bonheur* 590)

She indicates her belief that the growth of the department store is part of an evolutionary process with which it would be unconscionable to interfere:

[Il] y avait là une évolution naturelle du commerce, on n'empêcherait pas les choses d'aller comme elles devaient aller (*Bonheur* 574)

The repetition of the word 'évolution' is highly significant. There are several passages in the novel indicating the associated idea of Denise's awareness that Mouret is a man of his time and undertaking the 'besogne de son âge' (*Bonheur* 747).

Du reste, s'il avait eu la folie de fermer le *Bonheur*, un autre grand magasin aurait poussé de lui-même à côté, car l'idée soufflait des quatre points du ciel, le triomphe des cités ouvrières et industrielles était semé par le coup de vent du siècle, qui emportait l'édifice croulant des vieux âges.¹¹¹

Whereas Henri Guillemin sees her as a little saint,¹¹² Brian Nelson suggests that 'Denise becomes an apologist of free enterprise capitalism on the grounds of rationality and progress' and that the quality of the reforms she recommends to Mouret 'reflect her concern with efficiency as well as social justice' (Nelson, *Bourgeoisie*, p.29). Françoise Naudin-Patriat considers her proposed reforms utopian, whilst Naomi Schor sees her intervention as stereotypically female.¹¹³

¹¹¹ *Bonheur* 747. There is a parallel between this and the idea of the new social order which is suggested in *Germinal*.

¹¹² 'Et il est bon qu'elle soit vierge, pour devenir comme la petite sainte moderne et laïque, patronne du Haut Commerce humanitaire' (Guillemin, *Présentation*, p.210).

¹¹³ '[L]es améliorations sociales dues à la seule influence bénéfique de Denise paraissent un peu trop belles et rapides pour rendre compte d'autre chose que d'un rêve utopique, celui d'un vaste phalanstère où seraient réconciliés les intérêts des employés et du patron' (Naudin-Patriat, p.119) 'Il n'est pas difficile non plus de voir comment le rôle de Denise sera d'humaniser ce lieu, de faire coïncider la

Mme Caroline's attitude towards Saccard and his business practices and towards the notion of money in general is an important part of *Argent*. What becomes clear is that she is torn, on one hand, between her admiration for Saccard's vivacity and activity and the wonderful projects in the Middle East which are funded by the monies raised by the Banque Universelle, and on the other hand, her anxiety about the spectre of speculation and the greed and desperation it engenders in its gullible victims. Her attitude towards both Saccard and money swings from seeing them as the source of all good and then as the source of all evil, before finally coming to rest in a more ambiguous middle ground. This is another example of a female porte-parole character coming to a reasonable compromise, just as Clotilde finds a middle ground between science and faith.

Mme Caroline's watercolour representations of the Hamelin plans for development in the Middle East make clear her interpretation of progress:

La plaine encore était nue, les montagnes barraient l'horizon, elle évoquait la détresse de ce vieux monde endormi sur ses trésors, et que la science allait réveiller dans sa crasse et dans son ignorance. Que de grandes et belles et bonnes choses à accomplir! Peu à peu, une vision lui montrait des générations nouvelles, toute une humanité plus forte et plus heureuse poussant de l'antique sol, labouré à nouveau par le progrès. (*Argent* 135)

The similarities between these objectives associated with progress and the 'but ignoré' are apparent, as suggested by 'toute une humanité plus forte et plus heureuse' and 'grandes et belles et bonnes choses'.

Mme Caroline's attitude towards money, and towards Saccard as its agent, is equivocal in the same way that Denise appreciates modern commerce as a double edged sword. Brian Nelson comments:

Mme Caroline embodies a moral conscience, and her anxiety in the face of Saccard's uncontrolled behaviour springs from instinctively humane impulses. [...] What she would wish to transmit to Saccard - like Denise Baudu enticing

vocation domestique du magasin avec les nouvelles qualités morales dites féminines' (Naomi Schor, 'Devant le château : Femmes, marchandises et modernité dans *Au Bonheur des Dames*', in *Miscellanées Mitterand*, pp.179-186, p.181). In the article she draws a parallel between *Bonheur* and *Jane Eyre*, classifying them both as gothic novels.

Octave Mouret to reorganise the store in *Au Bonheur des Dames* on more humanitarian lines - is a sense of social responsibility. [...] Zola, with his strong sense of social obligation, implies that the corollary of leadership is responsibility.¹¹⁴

Mme Caroline sees money's potential for both good and bad. This is brought out very neatly in her observation of Saccard's two sons, the legitimate and effete Maxime and the illegitimate and hirsute savage Victor. When she first meets the latter in the squalid ghetto, she laments the impact of poverty in just the terms she will use to criticise the force of money : "Ah! misère, qui détruit et pourrit tout!" (*Argent* 152). Saccard's sons have had different rides on the money-go-round and Mme Caroline sees that both extremes are unhealthy. Each son has realised a potential for vice - Maxime's incestuous affair with his stepmother was seen in *Curée*, and at twelve years old Victor is in a sexual relationship with a woman of forty. Both too much money and not enough money corrupt.

Mme Caroline is worried about speculation, admitting to Saccard : "j'en ai une terreur folle" (*Argent* 114).

Ah! l'argent, cet argent pourrisseur, empoisonneur, qui desséchait les âmes, en chassait la bonté, la tendresse, l'amour des autres! Lui seul était le grand coupable, l'entremetteur de toutes les cruautés et de toutes les saletés humaines.¹¹⁵

The qualities which she considers compromised by money are those which Mme Caroline herself has in spades - goodness, tenderness and compassion, as we saw in the earlier part of this chapter. Saccard's eloquent defences of speculation and money do persuade her to see their potential for good:

Alors, Mme Caroline eut la brusque conviction que l'argent était le fumier dans lequel poussait cette humanité de demain.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴ Nelson, *Bourgeoisie*, pp.186-187.

¹¹⁵ *Argent* 219. She adds later : "Ah! l'argent, l'horrible argent, qui salit et dévore!" (221). Similar terminology is used to describe Saccard in the novel. For example : 'il était l'unique coupable' (216), and when the Banque Universelle collapses, Mme Caroline singles him out again as the lone culprit : 'Et, d'abord, elle s'était emportée contre Saccard, l'unique cause du désastre, l'ouvrier de leur malheur' (341), and later '[l]ui seul était coupable' (360). 'C'était Saccard qui avait tout pourri' (351).

¹¹⁶ *Argent* 224. Her attitude to money is expressed in similar terms: 'L'argent, empoisonneur et destructeur, devenait le ferment de toute végétation sociale, servait de terreau nécessaire aux grands travaux dont l'exécution rapprocherait les peuples et pacifierait la terre' (224-225). As we saw in the earlier discussion of patterns of imagery associated with the 'but ignoré', there is much dung which is

In a rare departure from her common-sense approach, Mme Caroline allows herself to grow over excited:

Elle avait maudit l'argent, elle tombait maintenant devant lui dans une admiration effrayée [...] Tout le bien naissait de lui, qui faisait tout le mal.¹¹⁷

Evidently the reasonableness which we have seen attributed to the female porte-parole characters dictates that a more moderate attitude is required. The 'third way' which Mme Caroline identifies between cursing and worshipping the power of money is drawn from Saccard's defence of his business practices. It hinges on a comparison between sex and procreation on the one hand and speculation and progress on the other. Mme Caroline takes this notion on board, persuaded by the analogy which was perhaps framed to appeal to her latent maternity:

Elle se rappelait cette idée que, sans la spéculation, il n'y aurait pas de grandes entreprises vivantes et fécondes, pas plus qu'il n'y aurait d'enfants, sans la luxure. Il faut cet excès de la passion, toute cette vie basement dépensée et perdue, à la continuation même de la vie. (*Argent* 224)

For Mme Caroline, money and its impact is like life itself - you must take the good and the bad and simply trust that somewhere there is an overall game plan for good. This parallel between progress and 'la vie' is important for our purposes. The novel closes with Mme Caroline reflecting on this issue : 'Pourquoi donc faire porter à l'argent la peine des saletés et des crimes dont il est la cause? L'amour est-il moins souillé, lui qui crée la vie?' (*Argent* 398).

Mme Caroline's belief in the potential of money for good is shared by Pauline and Denise. Pauline's repeated investment of her ever reducing capital into Lazare's schemes shows that she puts her money where her charitable mouth is. Denise sees

invested with the power to fertilise the future. 'Déjà la moisson des hommes et des grandes choses futures était semée, tout germait, ce serait avant quelques années un monde nouveau' (223). The famous conclusion to *Germinal* is echoed in Mme Caroline's reflections at the end of *L'Argent* : 'déjà la vie affluait de partout, le sol de l'antique berceau venait d'être ensemencé d'une nouvelle moisson d'hommes, le progrès de demain grandirait!' (398).

¹¹⁷ *Argent* 225. Earlier in the novel she was also swept away by Saccard's description of what wonders could be worked in the Middle East : 'Mme Caroline, d'un bon sens si solide, très réfractaire d'habitude aux imaginations trop chaudes, se laissait pourtant aller à cet enthousiasme' (75).

how by investing a small percentage of profits Mouret can improve conditions for his employees and thereby make them more productive units which in turn will increase turnover.

Françoise Naudin-Patriat considers that this ambivalence betrays Zola's concern with depicting the interplay of the competing forces of life and death:

Pourtant, la peinture n'est pas aussi contrastée en noir et blanc; le romancier prend soin de souligner le caractère ambivalent des activités qui grandissent dans la 'souillure' ou dans les décombres. [...] On retrouve ici ses convictions profondes, sa foi dans les forces de la vie et de l'activité qu'expriment notamment *Au Bonheur des Dames* et *L'Argent*. [...] Emile Zola croit au caractère positif de l'activité; même la plus destructrice, celle qui sème derrière elle le plus de désastres est féconde. (Naudin-Patriat, p.41)

A similar pattern is seen in Mme Caroline's attitude towards Saccard himself.¹¹⁸ As his housekeeper, her attitude is described as 'la gouvernante d'un prodigue, qu'elle se mettait à aimer, comme on aime les enfants mauvais sujets' (*Argent* 65). He is also the recipient of her maternal urges, as we will see later. But what is most appealing in Saccard as far as Mme Caroline is concerned is his vitality and his creation of life through his projects. This is what she loves in him, and is the basis on which she extends her (all important as a female porte-parole character) approval.

Elle le regardait, et, dans son amour de la vie, de tout ce qui était fort et actif, elle finissait par le trouver beau, séduisant de verve et de foi. (*Argent* 116)

She is 'séduite par ses qualités d'homme d'action, par son énergie à vaincre' (*Argent* 163) and her sympathy for him comes from 'l'activité et l'intelligence de ce petit homme' (201). Following the crash of the Banque Universelle she retains a 'tolérance pour cet homme si obstinément vivace' (336).

¹¹⁸ When, at the end of the novel, she leaves the prison after visiting him, she is debating 'Était-ce un coquin, était-ce un héros?' (*Argent* 384), still not sure whether or not Saccard is on the side of the angels. When she heard the orphans praying for him she moderated the anger she felt for him in the wake of the crash of the Banque Universelle, realising: 'il n'y a point d'homme condamnable, qui, au milieu de tout le mal qu'il a pu faire, n'ait encore fait beaucoup de bien' (377), which reflects her earlier impression of him that 'il y avait chez lui, comme chez tous les hommes, du pire et du meilleur' (162). As we will see, Pascal is convinced of 'l'utilité de chaque être' (*Pascal* 1023) and believes that nobody is all bad.

C'était l'amour triomphant, ce Saccard, ce bandit du trottoir financier, aimé si absolument par cette adorable femme, parce qu'elle le voyait, actif et brave, créer un monde, faire de la vie.¹¹⁹

She even equates Saccard to a force of nature.

Lui, cette force inconsciente et agissante, elle le subissait de nouveau, comme une des violences de la nature, sans doute nécessaires.¹²⁰

The idea of 'faire de la vie' appeals to the female porte-parole characters. We will see in the section below that it is what Pauline wants to do, and we have seen how Denise admires it in Mouret and how it is what Mme Caroline loves in Saccard. Their love of 'la vie' and creation is a key element in their characters and explains their approval and encouragement of those who are involved in its creation, even if a measure of bad is a necessary accompaniment to the good.

By whatever term they call it, this movement which rolls through the novels is one to which they wish to commit themselves. In what form can they demonstrate their devotion, and channel their efforts into helping 'la vie' along? Let us return to Pascal Rougon for some practical pointers which he has derived from his more philosophical approach to the question. From Pascal's belief in 'la vie' can be extracted some advice for life, some guidance for a *modus vivendi* to demonstrate commitment to the operation of nature in the novels. We can identify clues how : 'la vivre comme elle demande à être vécue' (*Pascal* 1085). For our purposes 'le juste emploi de l'être entier' appears best to summarise Pascal's advice for commitment to 'la vie'. Elements identified by Pascal include the importance of work and effort, the need to push back the frontiers of knowledge and understanding, and the procreative imperative, identified clearly by Pascal and seen in the attitude of the female porte-parole characters towards maternity.¹²¹

¹¹⁹ *Argent* 228. This idea is expressed earlier, suggesting that Saccard is lucky to have secured her affection : 'une chance imméritée, une récompense volée comme le reste' (163). In *Pascal* this aspect is referred to again : 'aimé de l'adorable Mme Caroline, sans doute en récompense de son exécration vie' (*Pascal* 1010).

¹²⁰ *Argent* 388. Note the connection between 'la vie' and nature suggested here.

¹²¹ There is a link between work and knowledge, as Pascal explains to Clotilde : "'Et comme tu as raison de dire que l'unique bonheur est l'effort continu! car, désormais, le repos dans l'ignorance est impossible'" (*Pascal* 992). The move towards truth through increased knowledge and understanding raises the issue of the intellectual (which was, as we remember, one of the damning attributes of some

Making an effort : active charity

One of the key elements of Pascal's approach to 'la vie' is the importance of work and effort. Guy Robert sees it in terms which echo the alternative religion angle discussed earlier:

Le travail devenait en effet partout le signe de l'adhésion donnée aux lois naturelles; il traduit un esprit de communion; exprimant la religion moderne, il dispense la vraie vertu, il assure le jugement de l'homme qu'il met en contact avec la vérité.¹²²

Everyone should be active and make their own individual, albeit small, contribution to the communal effort, which is the movement towards the 'but ignoré'. No matter what the field of endeavour, be it physical (Jean Macquart tilling the soil) or mental (Pierre Sandoz working away at his novels), the important thing is to make a contribution in an area in which one has a competence. *Œuvre* concludes with Sandoz's exhortation "Allons travailler" - work is the only response, be it to existential despair or writer's block.¹²³

Pascal has done this in his life, making his independent contributions to the sum of knowledge and the development of science, recognising that he does not have all the answers, but delighting in the awareness that others will build on his work and push

of the revolutionaries) and an apparent divide in the novels between 'raison' and 'idée'. 'En plus de l'action et du travail, nous distinguons dans *Le Docteur Pascal* un autre élément important, indispensable à l'avènement du bien-être de l'humanité, à savoir la vérité' (Kellner, *Pascal*, p.163).

¹²² Robert, *Emile Zola*, p.111. 'C'est par le travail et la vérité que Pascal voit la réalisation des grandes possibilités de la science. Pour lui, le travail constitue donc une des grandes vertus de l'existence. C'est seulement grâce au travail et l'effort que la science aboutira à des meilleures conditions de vie pour l'humanité' (Kellner, *Pascal*, p.160).

¹²³ Sandoz's status as a porte-parole is clear in the novel, too clear, in David Baguley's view: 'Cependant, le procédé dont *L'Œuvre* use avant tout - et abuse - demeure, bien entendu, celui de l'utilisation du porte-parole, grâce principalement à Sandoz, qui, de toutes les instances du texte, apparaît comme le détenteur privilégié du *logos*. C'est lui qui émet les thèses les plus chères de Zola : ses idées sur le mariage de l'artiste, sur l'évolution de la peinture et de la littérature, sa philosophie de la nature de "l'homme physiologique", ses diatribes contre le romantisme, ses accès de pessimisme' (David Baguley, *Zola et les Genres* (Glasgow: University of Glasgow French and German Publications, 1993), p.90). Guy Robert discusses the glorification of work and effort in the novels. 'Accompli avec la certitude d'opérer dans le sens de l'évolution naturelle, le travail assure la réussite et le bonheur de Denise Baudu et d'Octave Mouret; dans *L'Œuvre* le romancier Sandoz, qui emprunte évidemment beaucoup de traits à Zola lui-même, édifie seul, par la tenacité de son labeur, un monument durable' (Robert, *Emile Zola*, p.111).

back the frontiers of understanding.¹²⁴ His modesty to which we referred earlier is complemented by a humility which puts the common good before personal aggrandisement, as seen in his 'résignation vaillante au grand labeur commun, sans la révolte du moi qui exige un bonheur à lui, absolu' (*Pascal* 1210). This contrasts sharply with the personal ambition we saw in revolutionary characters such as Etienne Lantier and Florent.

The work in itself carries its own reward, as suggested in references such as 'l'effort doit trouver en soi sa récompense' (*Pascal* 1164) and 'la joie de cet effort accompli' (1211), and the characters are invited to take their pleasure there rather than fall prey to frustration that they are not individually associated with the project's completion. Mme Caroline attributes her optimism to effort : 'son invincible espoir lui venait-il donc de sa croyance à l'utilité de l'effort?' (*Argent* 398). Clotilde retains the essence of Pascal's teaching in the following passage: 'Si tous faisaient leur tâche, tous dormiraient tranquillement' (*Pascal* 1211).

Pascal also prescribes work and activity to his patients, telling Sarteur, for example, 'de reprendre sa vie de travail, ce qui était la meilleure hygiène physique et morale' (*Pascal* 1083). Pascal has identified in himself work's 'bonne influence dynamique' (1141) through observing his own body's response to a pattern of regular activity.¹²⁵ As he explains to Ramond:

'En somme, j'en serais arrivé à croire uniquement au travail, à mettre la santé dans le fonctionnement équilibré de tous les organes, une sorte de thérapeutique dynamique, si j'ose risquer ce mot.' (*Pascal* 1177)

So, it comes as no surprise that when financial crisis hits the household, Pascal's first thought is to work his way out of their difficulties by returning to the practice of medicine : 'Lui aussi se préoccupait, songeait au travail, comme à l'unique chance de salut' (*Pascal* 1118-1119). Work also does the trick for Clotilde, helping her through

¹²⁴ He acknowledges that 'l'œuvre étant toujours transitoire et restant quand même inachevée' (*Pascal* 1164). He is content for others to build on the foundation laid by him. 'Si même il n'avait eu le mérite que d'apporter l'hypothèse d'un moment, son travail ne serait pas perdu, car le progrès était sûrement dans l'effort, dans l'intelligence toujours en marche' (1177).

¹²⁵ Pascal's pattern of regular hours at his desk each day is very similar to Zola's own working habits. The similarities between author and character extend to the practice of assembling dossiers with cuttings from newspapers and other sources.

both mourning and pregnancy: 'Elle-même avait senti cette toute-puissance bienfaitrice du travail, au milieu de ses souffrances et de ses deuils' (1211).

Pascal identifies a role for work and effort as a regulating force of life. This is symbolised in the operation of the human heart, with which Pascal has been interested. The heart is 'cet ouvrier obstiné de la vie, sans cesse au travail' (*Pascal* 1180). Work is 'le moteur unique, le bienfaiteur et le consolateur' (*Pascal* 1159) - note how the positive effects of work include the aspect of consolation, which helped Clotilde. In his vision of the new order : 'Le travail devenait ainsi la grande loi, le régulateur de l'univers vivant.'¹²⁶

According to Pascal, therefore, it seems that doing what you can is good for you and also for the common good. This is certainly Sven Kellner's interpretation:

Pour le maître, la grande tâche de l'être humain était donc de contribuer à l'évolution naturelle des choses à force de travailler afin de nous assurer le plus de bien-être possible. [...] Pour Zola, tout progrès est basé sur le travail, condition sine qua non de l'avènement d'une société meilleure. Il s'agit donc pour l'humanité d'agir avec beaucoup de volonté et de force, le mot-clé de cette philosophie étant action.¹²⁷

For Alfred C. Proulx, the path to 'bonheur' is through an awareness of the life force to which one demonstrates one's commitment through work and effort.¹²⁸

The major active contribution made by the female porte-parole characters is in their charitable endeavours, motivated by concern for the underdog and the victims of disasters both natural and born of rapid social change. The latter is seen clearly in Denise's humanitarian intervention in the management of the department store and her efforts to reduce the destructive repercussions of its impact on the small specialised shops in the area. For Mme Caroline and Pauline, it is an awareness of the suffering of others and of their own relatively privileged position which behoves them

¹²⁶ *Pascal* 1178. Elsewhere it is described as 'régulateur du monde' (1143).

¹²⁷ Kellner, *Pascal*, p.162.

¹²⁸ 'Son bonheur repose dans sa capacité de se rendre compte de l'omnipotence des forces naturelles et dans sa volonté d'y contribuer, de s'engager dans la lutte : de travailler' (Proulx, *Aspects épiques*, p.120).

to do what they can to alleviate suffering, especially when they feel, rightly or wrongly, implicated in its cause.

The charity they practise is best characterised as active. This passage to action, this courage and confidence of their convictions serves as a point of contrast with the revolutionary characters, whose efforts are limited, more or less, to idle discussion and dreaming. Mme Caroline has no time for the simpering and ineffectual pity of those people unwilling to involve themselves in tackling the problems of poverty and promiscuity. Her work for the *Œuvre du Travail* charity, with its distinctly practical focus, is assiduous. Just as she disapproves of the self-indulgence of philosophical debates with a ‘grand dédain de ces récréations psychologiques’ (*Argent* 163), she is described as a ‘vaillante qui préférerait l’action aux apitoiements bavards’ (73) and takes an active role in the rehabilitation of Saccard’s illegitimate son, Victor, convinced that this falls under her jurisdiction as Saccard’s faithful housekeeper - guarding both Saccard’s house and the interests of the House of Saccard.¹²⁹

Both Pauline and Denise appear to derive some pleasure from self-sacrifice. Denise finds fulfilment in her devotion to her younger brothers Jean and Pépé. Even when she is in particularly straitened financial circumstances she still finds a few francs to slip to the hapless Jean, whose succession of amorous adventures represents a financial strain on the family. Denise derives enjoyment from that self-sacrifice : ‘Son luxe était là’ (*Bonheur* 579). When Pauline is forced to make significant spending cuts, she fights to keep her charity budget intact : ‘il lui fallait faire des miracles d’économie, pour sauver l’argent de ses aumônes’,¹³⁰ as her weekly distributions are the highlight of her life.

¹²⁹ ‘N’était-elle pas là pour veiller sur sa maison et sur sa tranquillité?’ (*Argent* 144). There is also a degree of damage control in her action in this regard, informed for her by the shame which she considers Saccard will certainly feel should his illegitimate child be revealed as the vicious street urchin she discovers. She does not tell Saccard about Victor, preferring to try and have him socialised and cleaned up in the *Œuvre du Travail* orphanage. It is later revealed that Saccard’s response is one of delight not despair, but he never manages to meet his son, his imprisonment and Victor’s escape into the Parisian underworld rendering impossible their ever meeting.

¹³⁰ *Joie* 1017. After the Lazare-Louise *ménage* suffers a financial disaster, Pauline settles most of her remaining capital on their son Paul in trust, which once again cuts back funds available for charity : ‘son seul chagrin était de restreindre ses aumônes accoutumées’ (1110).

[E]lle ne se débattait plus que pour sauver les sous de ses aumônes. La crainte d'avoir à interrompre ses distributions du samedi, la désolait, car elle y goûtait sa meilleure joie de la semaine. (*Joie* 1049)

Her charitable activity, overlaid with a little self-sacrifice, seems to be a key element in how Pauline sees and structures her life : 'cette charité active qui faisait du bonheur des autres son existence à elle' (*Joie* 1122). As Ida-Marie Frandon comments:

Une destinée individuelle, d'une certaine qualité est capable de trouver le bonheur dans l'abnégation. L'amour de la vie engendre alors le renoncement.¹³¹

This is a characteristic shared by Clotilde. For example, when Pascal falls ill, she devotes all her attention to him, in spite of their ongoing ideological differences:

C'était un don de sa personne, un oubli d'elle-même, un besoin de faire son bonheur du bonheur d'un autre; et cela inconsciemment, sous la seule impulsion de son cœur de femme, au milieu de cette crise qu'elle traversait, qui la modifiait profondément, sans qu'elle en raisonnât.¹³²

They persevere in their charitable efforts, even though they meet with setbacks or quake before the enormity of the task ahead. Even though they perceive the limitations of charity, they see in it a way in which they may contribute to the common good. In a variation of Pascal's stoic resignation, they do what they can, because they believe that they must do something. The fact that they may be motivated in their activity by unfulfilled needs (such as the princesse d'Orviedo's unrealised maternity) or that they may derive pleasure from the self-sacrifice which is an extreme manifestation of generosity, does not detract from the value of their contribution to the common good.¹³³ Making a small, concrete achievement is much better than, for example, the grandiose and unrealised plans of the revolutionary characters.

¹³¹ CN 5 (1956), p.218.

¹³² *Pascal* 1040. When she and Pascal try to persuade each other that Clotilde going to Paris to look after Maxime is the best thing for all of them, both are motivated by an 'oubli de soi-même, dans l'unique besoin du bonheur de l'autre' (*Pascal* 1139).

¹³³ Brian Nelson makes a connection between charity and maternity. 'Their quasi-maternal attitudes are reflected in their compassionate response to social injustice. Denise and Caroline in particular have a keen sense of social duty and social purpose. [...] Charity, hope, stoicism and self-abnegation are the principal characteristics of Caroline Hamelin. But the fact of her childlessness, echoed by that of the Princess d'Orviedo, remains an inconsolable tragedy. In *L'Argent* philanthropy is still defined by its compensatory value' (Nelson, *Bourgeoisie*, p.56).

The procreative imperative

One of the most obvious contributions to make to the life-force is to enter into 'la vie' and procreate. Among the interplay of cosmic forces at work in the novels is the struggle between life and death, between fertility and sterility. Guy Robert maintains that 'le romancier a toujours vu dans la seule Fécondité une garantie suffisante du progrès' (Robert, *Emile Zola*, p.178). Children and motherhood feature in the *Rougon-Macquart* novels as a loaded indicator. Zola's own attitude towards procreation is well documented and one of the novels in the later *Quatre Evangiles* cycle, the unambiguously named *Fécondité*, addresses the issue of reproduction and discusses strategies for halting the decline of France's population.¹³⁴ It was a long-standing interest of the author, as Chantal Bertrand-Jennings observes:

Pour Zola, la mission par excellence de la femme est la maternité, dont il fait l'éloge tout au long de son œuvre, et qu'il finit par diviniser.¹³⁵

This raises an interesting point for us - how can we reconcile Zola's apparent rating of maternity as the primordial function of women, and the fact that in the novels under discussion, of these four privileged characters only two become mothers?¹³⁶ Put simply, the answer seems to us to be that Pauline and Mme Caroline share Zola's view of maternity, and are both of them frustrated in their desire to achieve it, and expend the 'vacant' energy in their charity work and also in their effective adoption of other people's children as their own. Whereas Mme Caroline's attitude towards motherhood seems to be based on purely personal considerations, Pauline's attitude is informed by what appears to be a biological imperative to exploit her body's fertility.

¹³⁴ 'Maternity is given a quasi-religious aura in Zola's later works. Virginity and sterility are calamities, while the principle of fecundity is assimilated to Zola's myth of regenerative optimism; it is the motor of social progress, the guarantee of hope and continuity' (Nelson, *Bourgeoisie*, p.57).

¹³⁵ 'Zola féministe? (II)', *CN*, 45 (1973), 1-22 (p.18).

¹³⁶ Clotilde becomes the mother of the 'enfant inconnu'. Throughout *Bonheur*, Denise is a surrogate mother to her two younger brothers, and her love of children is made clear in the text. It is not until *Pascal* that the births of her own two children, fathered by Octave Mouret, are announced (*Pascal* 1016).

Chantal Bertrand-Jennings suggests that maternity is more a state of mind than a biological issue.¹³⁷

Denise, Pauline and Mme Caroline all enjoy a surrogate motherhood. Denise is the 'petite mère' (*Bonheur* 783) of her two younger brothers, having looked after them since the death of their mother : 'elle était restée la mère des deux enfants' (394) and like any mother is 'prise de terreurs maternelles' (395) about the future and welfare of her charges, and she retains 'son autorité inquiète de mère' (776) even as they grow older. She feels obligated to put their interests first in light of 'le dévouement maternel qu'elle avait voué à ses deux frères' (514) and on more than one occasion uses them as the reason, or perhaps excuse, for not considering marriage - to Mouret or to anyone else.¹³⁸ When Mouret promotes her to running her own counter in the department store, it is a new childrenswear section, which suits her well. 'Elle adorait les enfants, on ne pouvait la mieux placer' (726). Mouret observes her there on occasion, flourishing among the children, and this serves further to enhance her attraction for him. He also watches her mothering her two almost grown-up brothers.¹³⁹

Pauline Quenu, as we saw earlier, pushes her beloved cousin, Lazare, into marriage with Louise, one of her childhood friends. Pauline's attitude towards Lazare exhibits in itself a maternal quality : 'elle prenait peu à peu sur lui une autorité grondeuse de mère' (*Joie* 883), and her 'compassion maternelle' (927) for Lazare reflects the way in which she runs the house : 'Pauline restait la mère de son petit monde'.¹⁴⁰ After the death of Mme Chanteau, Lazare underlines the filial nature of his love for Pauline, in contrast to the episodes of passion the cousins shared previously.¹⁴¹

¹³⁷ 'Il ne s'agit pas, bien entendu, de la maternité biologique, car les romans zoliens comptent de nombreuses mauvaises mères, comme des femmes idéales qui n'ont pas donné naissance. La maternité, pourrait-on dire, est ici plutôt un état d'esprit' (Bertrand-Jennings, *Eros et la Femme*, p.97).

¹³⁸ 'Non, non, jamais elle ne se marierait, elle avait assez de deux enfants' (*Bonheur* 399). 'Ils étaient sa seule raison de vivre et de travailler, puisque, de nouveau, elle jurait de ne se marier jamais' (777).

¹³⁹ 'Depuis un instant, il la regardait faire son ménage de petite mère, entre les deux gaillards, les grondant et les embrassant, les retournant comme des bébés qu'on change de linge' (*Bonheur* 777).

¹⁴⁰ *Joie* 1028. Reference is made to 'son air maternel, de cet air grave qu'elle prenait aux heures importantes du ménage' (1024).

¹⁴¹ "'Tu es la meilleure et la plus sage ... Mais je t'aime toujours, je t'aime comme j'ai aimé maman'" (*Joie* 1040).

It is, however, towards Paul, Lazare's son, that Pauline demonstrates the full force of her maternal energy. After a difficult labour during which there is considerable doubt as to whether either mother or baby will survive, Paul is born weak and half-dead.¹⁴²

Whilst the doctor and midwife attend to the exhausted Louise, Pauline resuscitates the infant in an adjacent room, not daunted by the fact that the life is barely viable : 'une autre aurait abandonné cette résurrection impossible' (*Joie* 1102), bringing to the task 'un désespoir obstiné de mère' (*ibid.*), motivated by 'un besoin grandissant de vaincre, de faire de la vie'.¹⁴³ She succeeds, giving breath to the baby to whom Louise gave birth, thereby establishing a bond of second-hand maternity with the infant.¹⁴⁴

Mme Caroline's connection with Victor, Saccard's illegitimate son, is born of much less intense circumstances, but nevertheless she invests considerable time and emotional energy into taming the turbulent creature. Her attachment to Victor is perhaps more closely linked to her feelings for Saccard. Like Pauline and Lazare, there is a maternal quality to her bond with the swarthy financier, and her attitude is described as 'presque maternelle' (*Argent* 163). When she flounders in her feelings for Saccard, she wills herself 'se conduire plus en mère qu'en amante' (206). Her relationship with Victor, her 'maternité d'adoption' (364) is used to explain her consenting to continuing the sexual relationship with Saccard which they had previously decided to end, and 'une maternité était au fond de son abandon' (163). She concludes that there must be some 'perversion sentimentale' (162) clouding the distinction between her interest in Victor and her interest in Saccard. When she visits Saccard for their definitive farewell 'la maternité souffrante' combines with a 'faiblesse de femme' and 'l'infini besoin de tendresse' to inform the emotion of the occasion (388).

¹⁴² Chantal Bertrand-Jennings suggests that such a birth is Louise's punishment because she 'ne sait qu'être amante, ce dont elle sera punie par un accouchement-boucherie' (Bertrand-Jennings, *Eros et la Femme*, p.106).

¹⁴³ *Joie* 1102. 'Faire de la vie' is a significant formulation which ties in to the concept of the 'but ignoré', as we have seen. The text also refers to the motivation of her efforts : 'se dépensant, avec sa charité débordante' (*ibid.*), underlining Pauline's irrepressible charity.

¹⁴⁴ As we saw in the section above on charity, there is pleasure to be had in self-sacrifice. Ida-Marie Frandon suggests that her resuscitation of Paul is a source of happiness for Pauline: 'Dans cet oubli de soi, dans ce sacrifice constant et total de soi-même, Pauline trouve le bonheur; voici la dernière scène du roman. Pauline - c'est aussi l'attitude de Clotilde à la fin du *Docteur Pascal* - tient l'enfant sur ses genoux' (CN 5 (1956) p.215).

That Mme Caroline should seize the opportunity to mother those who cross her path is hardly surprising, as the text refers to her unfulfilled maternity on a number of occasions. Within a page or two of meeting her the reader is informed that her one regret in life is 'celui de n'avoir pas eu d'enfant', which is reinforced throughout the novel.¹⁴⁵ She is an obvious soft touch for taking on administrative duties at the Œuvre du Travail orphanage, where she enjoys contact with the children living there. Already thirty-five and widowed, she seems reconciled to a life as companion to her itinerant engineer of a brother, and accepts that bearing children will not be part of her life. When Jordan announces that he and Marcelle are awaiting the patter of tiny feet, it rouses Mme Caroline's 'incurable désespoir de sa stérilité' (*Argent* 349).

Pauline Quenu's attitude to motherhood and fertility is one of the key ideas presented in *Joie*. Her interest in her body's functions and her desire to understand its operation is entirely without prurience.¹⁴⁶ Once Lazare's abandoned medical textbooks have yielded up their secrets in response to her diligent perusal, her awareness of her womanhood constitutes an important structure in the novel. In what Jean-Marie Paisse considers a daring move, Zola made frank use of Pauline's menstrual cycle symbolically to underline key plot elements in the novel.¹⁴⁷ For example, the arrival of her period coincides with Lazare and Louise's wedding night, and later in the novel she is menstruating when Louise goes into labour with Paul - two incidents which reinforce the theme of her latent and unexploited fertility. Throughout the novel Pauline is conscious firstly of her body's potential to bear children and then secondly, of how she will be denied the opportunity to realise that very potential.

¹⁴⁵ *Argent* 60. For example : 'sa maternité inassouvie, son amour désespéré des enfants' (72), 'sa maternité de femme restée stérile' (143), 'son grand chagrin de femme stérile' (162).

¹⁴⁶ She consults Lazare's textbooks discreetly, hiding them when Mme Chanteau arrives : 'non pas en curieuse coupable, mais en travailleuse dont les parents auraient contrarié la vocation' (*Joie* 854). In addition, 'elle n'avait pas de honte, elle était sérieuse, [...] emportée et sauvée des idées charnelles par son amour de la santé' (*ibid.*).

¹⁴⁷ 'A cette époque particulièrement sévère sur le plan de la sexualité, il fallut beaucoup de courage à Emile Zola pour proposer au public les pages que nous allons analyser' (Jean-Marie Paisse, 'L'éducation sexuelle de Pauline Quenu dans *La Joie de vivre*', *CN*, 41 (1971), 35-41, p.35, n.1).

Pauline delights in her maturing body, experiencing 'la joie de son épanouissement',¹⁴⁸ and maintaining a calm and informed attitude : 'elle acceptait sans fièvre la floraison de la vie, ce lent épanouissement de son corps' (*Joie* 875). She relishes the 'bonheur d'être femme' (1043). In an interesting parallel to the famous mirror scene in *Nana*, Pauline inspects herself on the night of Lazare and Louise's wedding. Whereas the eponymous heroine of the earlier novel fairly gorges on self-love, Pauline's assessment of her body centres not on her sexual attractiveness, but on 'son ventre où dormait une maternité puissante'.¹⁴⁹ Her disappointment is not so much for herself, though she does realise that 'jamais elle ne connaîtrait ces joies' (1061), but more as she considers that she will not be fulfilling the necessary and natural function inherent in her very femininity:

Elle voulait vivre, et vivre complètement, faire de la vie, elle qui aimait la vie!
A quoi bon être, si l'on ne donne pas son être?¹⁵⁰

She effectively gives life to Paul,¹⁵¹ but that does not completely fulfil her maternal urges, and after his resuscitation, Pauline reflects on her probable sterility,¹⁵² which seems incongruous, given her health and attitude which are in stark contrast to Louise's, as Chantal Bertrand-Jennings observes:

Robustement constituée, pourvue de toutes les qualités des femmes idéales du texte zolien : équilibre, simplicité, honnêteté, raison, bonté, courage, dévouement, abnégation, elle s'oppose en tous points à Louise.¹⁵³

¹⁴⁸ *Joie* 857. Once her knowledge has overcome the fear (born of ignorance) of menstruation, her attitude is positive : 'Le sang qui montait et qui crevait en pluie rouge, la rendait fière' (*ibid.*), and she is 'heureuse de son odeur nouvelle de femme' (*ibid.*).

¹⁴⁹ *Joie* 1043. At the end of the inspection she notices the menstrual blood snaking away, uselessly, down her thigh. This visual appraisal of her body complements an earlier examination of her pudenda. 'La première fois, elle se souvenait d'avoir crié d'épouvante, lorsqu'elle s'était trouvée un matin ensanglantée. Plus tard, n'avait-elle pas eu l'enfantillage, le soir, avant d'éteindre sa bougie, d'étudier d'un regard furtif l'éclosion complète de sa chair et de son sexe? Elle était fière comme une sottise, elle goûtait le bonheur d'être femme. Ah! misère! la pluie rouge de la puberté tombait là, aujourd'hui, pareille aux larmes vaines que sa virginité pleurait en elle. Désormais, chaque mois ramènerait ce jaillissement de grappe mûre, écrasée aux vendanges, et jamais elle ne serait femme, et elle vieillirait dans la stérilité!' (1043-1044).

¹⁵⁰ *Joie* 1044. Surely an allusion to the 'juste emploi de l'être entier' can be seen in the 'complètement'.

¹⁵¹ 'De plus, sa maternité véritable sera authentifiée par la fortune qu'elle lègue à l'enfant et par le don que le père, Lazare, fait de son fils à Pauline' (Bertrand-Jennings, *L'Eros et la Femme*, p.107).

¹⁵² 'C'était un regret immense de son existence manquée, de son sexe de femme qui dormirait stérile' (*Joie* 1103).

¹⁵³ Bertrand-Jennings, *L'Eros et la Femme*, p.106.

She seems to accept that 'jamais elle ne serait mère' (*Joie* 1103), and she chooses the image of a barren field to represent this reality. She mourns the child she will never have, and still manages, in her 'oubli d'elle-même' (*ibid.*), to look beyond her own situation to the needs of those around her.¹⁵⁴ Chantal Bertrand-Jennings sees in this pattern of surrogate maternity a struggle on the author's part to accept female sexuality.¹⁵⁵ She also draws a parallel between Pauline and Désirée Mouret - both of them are free of negative qualities - they have a special status in the novels:

Seules ces deux dernières, à la fois par le développement de leur personnage et par le grandissement épique de leur silhouette, atteignent au symbole de vierge-mère, nouvel avatar du dogme de l'Immaculée Conception.¹⁵⁶

The case of Clotilde is particularly instructive in the presentation of maternity in *Les Rougon-Macquart*. In an advance on Pauline's biological knowledge, Clotilde's awareness of a procreative imperative is made clear in *Pascal*. Her views coincide with those of Pascal himself, namely that the only objective of sexual activity should be procreation. She is convinced that they will conceive a child:

C'était, pour elle, la conséquence naturelle et indispensable de l'acte. Au bout de chacun de ses baisers, se trouvait la pensée de l'enfant; car tout amour qui n'avait pas l'enfant pour but, lui semblait inutile et vilain. [...] Cependant, ses études d'histoire naturelle lui avaient montré que le fruit était le souci unique de la nature. Lui seul importait, lui seul devenait le but, toutes les précautions se trouvaient prises pour que la semence ne fût point perdue et que la mère enfantât.¹⁵⁷

These thoughts are expressed after her formal adherence to Pascal's belief in 'la vie', of which this natural imperative - 'lois naturelles' (*Pascal* 1086) - is an important component. Their initial failure to conceive becomes an emotional issue in her

¹⁵⁴ '[E]lle pleurait l'enfant qu'elle n'aurait pas' (*Joie* 1103) and 'pleurant encore des larmes, où se mêlaient le regret de sa maternité et sa pitié pour la misère de tous les vivants' (*ibid.*).

¹⁵⁵ She suggests that *Pascal* marks the change in attitude. 'Tout se passe comme si, à cette étape de la pensée zolienne, la sexualité ne pouvait nullement être acceptée, même par le biais de la fécondité maternelle [...] Aussi, toutes les véritables mères modèles sont-elles des mères adoptives, pour la plupart des vierges dont la maternité n'a pas eu la sexualité pour médiatrice' (Bertrand-Jennings, *L'Eros et la femme*, p.105).

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p.106.

¹⁵⁷ *Pascal* 1086. This is also the basis of one of her dissatisfactions with novels. 'Mais, surtout, son continuel étonnement, sa continuelle indignation étaient de voir que, dans les romans d'amour, on ne se préoccupait jamais de l'enfant' (*ibid.*). This loss of focus on procreation strikes her as 'malpropre et imbécile' (1087). Pascal is delighted by her attitude: 'Aucun don ne peut égaler celui de la femme jeune qui se donne, et qui donne le flot de la vie, l'enfant peut-être' (1130).

departure for Paris, Pascal blaming himself for his inability to impregnate her.¹⁵⁸ Although he learns of her pregnancy before his death, Pascal does not live to see his son, though dies comforted by the prospect of progeny.

What is interesting is Clotilde's attitude to motherhood when it finally eventuates. It is an important part of her acceptance of life with its mix of good and bad.¹⁵⁹ Not only is there hope in what the child might achieve in the future, but motherhood has confirmed Clotilde's adherence to the procreative imperative:

Elle avait une fonction, un but, et elle le sentait bien à sa sérénité heureuse, elle faisait sûrement ce qu'elle était venue faire.¹⁶⁰

Clotilde's serenity at the end of the novel is important, reflecting as it does the assimilation of Pascal's teachings and his fundamental optimism. One point which Pascal accepts about the world is that there is good and bad in it. Even 'la vie' is not without its downside. It incorporates positive and negative elements : 'beaucoup de bien malgré tout, s'il y avait beaucoup de mal' (*Pascal* 1024), and both good and bad must be accepted as part of the deal : 'tout accepter, tout employer au bonheur' (1212).

His commitment to finding the truth means that he exposes life in all its ugliness, the better to improve it: 'Il en avait la volonté, il dirait tout, puisqu'il faut tout dire pour tout guérir' (*Pascal* 1005). He attempts to instil an optimism in Clotilde, inviting her to share his view that nothing and nobody are irredeemably bad:

D'ailleurs, n'était-ce pas la vie? Il n'y a pas de mal absolu. Jamais un homme n'est mauvais pour tout le monde, il fait toujours le bonheur de quelqu'un; de

¹⁵⁸ "Avec moi, tu resterais stérile, tu aurais cette douleur de n'être pas toute la femme, la mère! Va-t'en donc, puisque je ne suis plus un homme!" (*Pascal* 1143). It is precisely with this burden of unrealised maternity which Pauline has to cope. There is a parallel here between Pascal and the (other?) revolutionaries - their virility has been compromised by their revolutionary activity, in Pascal's case it is science which has emasculated him. 'Certaines nuits, il arrivait à maudire la science, qu'il accusait de lui avoir pris le meilleur de sa virilité' (*Pascal* 1047).

¹⁵⁹ She is more balanced in the 'science-faith' department than she was previously. 'Peut-être était-ce l'enfant, cette continuation d'elle-même, qui lui cachait désormais l'horreur de sa fin' (*Pascal* 1210-1211).

¹⁶⁰ *Pascal* 1211. 'Elle avait aimé, elle était mère, et elle comprenait' (1209).

sorte que, lorsqu'on ne se met pas à un point de vue unique, on finit par se rendre compte de l'utilité de chaque être.¹⁶¹

Several critics describe the female porte-parole characters as a group characterised principally by their brave acceptance of both the good and the bad of life.¹⁶² Take Mme Caroline, for example, who remains optimistic in spite of a catalogue of disasters, both in her private life and in that of those around her : 'toute cette abominable souffrance que coûte à l'humanité chaque pas en avant'.¹⁶³ Her ambivalent attitude towards money, progress, speculation and Saccard recognises the co-existence (and perhaps, co-dependence?) of good and bad - each appears to be necessary to the other.¹⁶⁴

Mme Caroline identifies more clearly than the other female porte-paroles this movement towards a goal which appears to operate throughout at least the second half of *Les Rougon-Macquart*. For our purposes, the following passage from *Argent* is one of the most important in the cycle:

Certes, aucune illusion ne lui restait, la vie était décidément injuste et ignoble, comme la nature. Pourquoi donc cette déraison de l'aimer, de la vouloir, de compter, ainsi que l'enfant à qui l'on promet un plaisir toujours différé, sur le but lointain et inconnu vers lequel, sans fin, elle nous conduit? Puis, lorsqu'elle tourna dans la rue de la Chaussée-d'Antin, elle ne raisonna même plus; la philosophe en elle, la savante et la lettrée, abdiquait, fatiguée de l'inutile recherche des causes; elle n'était plus qu'une créature heureuse du beau ciel et de l'air doux, goûtant l'unique jouissance de se bien porter, d'entendre ses petits pieds fermes battre le trottoir. Ah! la joie d'être, est-ce qu'au fond il en existe une autre? La vie telle qu'elle est, dans sa force, si abominable qu'elle soit, avec son éternel espoir! (*Argent* 396-397)

¹⁶¹ Pascal 1023. Clotilde shows proof of the same optimism, referring to 'la vie qu'on ne se lasse pas de croire bonne' (1218).

¹⁶² 'Cependant, par-delà les distinctions de surface, il existe de larges groupes de la même espèce. La jeune femme qui accepte la vie telle qu'elle est, courageusement : Denise Baudu, Pauline Quenu, Caroline et Clotilde' (Proulx, *Aspects épiques*, pp.101-102). 'Le personnage de Clotilde dans le dernier roman n'est pas très loin de ceux de Denise Baudu, de Pauline Quenu, de Mme Caroline, Zola tenant à incarner en une jeune femme l'acceptation lucide et courageuse de la vie' (Robert, *Emile Zola*, p.118).

¹⁶³ *Argent* 398. Halina Suwala quotes a passage from the *ébauche* of the novel: 'La passion faisant de la vie quand même, dans le charnier humain. Cette idée serait grande, belle et vraie. Aimer la vie quand même, même malpropre, injuste et brutale, parce qu'elle est une force, qu'elle va à l'avenir' (Suwala, *Miscellanées Mitterand*, p.44).

¹⁶⁴ We see this, for example, in her attitude towards money : 'Tout le bien naissait de lui, qui faisait tout le mal' (*Argent* 225).

She establishes the parallel between 'la vie' and 'nature' which we saw drawn earlier by Pascal and Clotilde. Acknowledging the unpleasant aspects ('injuste', 'ignoble' and 'abominable') she still has faith in it ('déraison' indicates belief rather than reason, and as the text specifies, she is no longer rationalising everything), which complements her hope, as the 'force' of 'la vie' holds out the promise of 'plaisir'. 'La vie' is not in itself the 'plaisir' (though there is pleasure to be had from the mere fact of existence : 'l'unique jouissance de se bien porter' and 'la joie d'être') but the way towards ('vers lequel, sans fin, elle nous conduit') the 'but lointain et inconnu'.

In the closing pages of *Argent*, Mme Caroline returns to her flat to prepare for her departure from Paris to join her brother in Italy. She has said her farewells to Saccard, witnessed the death of Sigismond Busch, learnt that the wild child Victor Saccard is roaming at large in the city, catalogued the victims of the crash of the Banque Universelle and is yet amazed to find herself oozing hope and confidence in the future - demonstrating the attitude that she has been preaching (and practising) throughout the novel.¹⁶⁵ Brian Nelson describes Mme Caroline in very flattering terms:

[She] incarnates an indomitable joy in life despite the misfortunes she has experienced. The inextinguishable fund of hope she retains connotes a mature and balanced acceptance of the vicissitudes of life springing from her extensive knowledge and experience; a tolerance unmarked by naïveté; a blithe optimism and faith in progress; a natural prudence and integrity; a generosity of spirit and outlook. Intelligent, scrupulous and liberal-minded, she is one of Zola's series of Ideal Women who are characterised by charity, hope, stoicism and self-abnegation. (Nelson, *Bourgeoisie*, p.183)

One possible explanation for Pascal's and Mme Caroline's optimism is their belief that 'la vie' is a self-regulating force, and will itself establish a balance, compensating for the bad with the good. As 'la vie' has the matter in hand, Mme Caroline realises

¹⁶⁵ 'Non, non! les affreuses catastrophes étaient trop récentes, elle ne pouvait être gaie, s'abandonner à ce jaillissement d'éternelle vie qui la soulevait. Et elle s'efforçait de garder son deuil, elle se rappelait au désespoir par tant de souvenirs cruels. Quoi? elle aurait ri encore, après l'écroulement de tout, une si effrayante somme de misères! Oubliait-elle qu'elle était complice? et elle se citait les faits, celui-ci, celui-là, cet autre, qu'elle aurait dû mettre tout son reste d'existence à pleurer. Mais, entre ses doigts serrés sur son cœur, le bouillonnement de sève devenait plus impétueux, la source de vie débordait, écartait les obstacles pour couler librement, en rejetant les épaves aux deux bords, claire et triomphante sous le soleil. Dès ce moment, vaincue, Mme Caroline dut s'abandonner à la force irrésistible du continuel rajeunissement' (*Argent* 396). Note the use of natural imagery and the

that she simply needs to keep on in her commitment to it: 'Vivre, cela devait suffire, pour que la vie lui apportât sans cesse la guérison des blessures que la vie lui faisait.'¹⁶⁶ For Pascal it is tied to his awareness that he should not intervene in 'la vie' running her course, which affords him 'la certitude supérieure que la vie se suffisait'.¹⁶⁷

Et, après tant de Rougon terribles, après tant de Macquart abominables, il en naissait encore un. La vie ne craignait pas d'en créer un de plus, dans le défi brave de son éternité. Elle poursuivait son œuvre, se propageait selon ses lois, indifférente aux hypothèses, en marche pour son labeur infini. Au risque de faire des monstres, il fallait bien qu'elle créât, puisque, malgré les malades et les fous qu'elle crée, elle ne se lasse pas de créer, avec l'espoir sans doute que les bien portants et les sages viendront un jour. La vie, la vie qui coule en torrent, qui continue et recommence, vers l'achèvement ignoré! (*Pascal* 1219)

Note how 'la vie' too has the courage and bravery which we established among the characteristics of the female porte-paroles. Accepting the good and the bad as part of the deal and hoping for the best, just like her adherents. This is another point of contrast with the febrile extremism of the revolutionary characters who cannot accept that things are not completely perfect instantly. This attitude of reasonable moderation means that Pascal and the female porte-parole characters are more stable and more likely to be happy and contented.¹⁶⁸

This contentment is also enhanced by the gratification they derive from their active commitment to 'la vie'. Setting their focus on the doing and the achievement of small concrete tasks, rather than disillusionment and paralysis stemming from impotence in the face of a large-scale revolutionary process, has a dual result - firstly, there is actual accomplishment and secondly the characters are happy campers, deriving satisfaction from their efforts. Confidence in the 'triomphe final de la vie' leads to 'sérénité sinon le bonheur' (*Pascal* 953).

repetitions of 'vie'. It is also important to note the 'irrésistible' which complements the earlier 'invincible'. '[C]ontinuel rajeunissement' is perhaps a reference to the cyclical eternity of 'la vie'.

¹⁶⁶ *Argent* 226. '[E]lle comptait sur le travail de la vie pour effacer la tare, pour réparer le mal, de même que la sève qui monte toujours ferme l'entaille au cœur d'un chêne, refait du bois et de l'écorce' (163).

¹⁶⁷ *Pascal* 1088. 'A plusieurs reprises, Pascal reviendra sur cette autorégulation, sur ces équilibres qui balancent le bien et le mal' (Malinas, *Zola et les hérédités imaginaires*, p.214).

¹⁶⁸ 'L'optimisme ne naît jamais de l'ignorance - Caroline est une femme mûre, d'expérience, ayant reçu par ailleurs une solide formation; Pauline n'ignore rien des misères humaines, Pascal est un savant

What is advocated by Pascal and practised by the female porte-paroles is a modest, individual contribution to a communal goal, a 'petite pierre apportée à l'œuvre lointaine et mystérieuse' (*Pascal* 1024). The importance of pulling together reflects the insignificance of the individual, and the fundamental tininess of human life in the grand scale of nature.¹⁶⁹ Recognition of the limits of one's individual importance and the scale of one's own contribution to the common good, combined with an acceptance of the mix of both good and bad in the world leads to a stoic resignation.

'La vie' is a force which runs through the novels, one in which these privileged characters have confidence, and which they believe is leading in the 'right' direction. For Pascal, the relationship with nature is the key element, for the female porte-paroles it appears to be associated with progress of a more man-made variety, namely science, modern commerce and financial speculation. For our purposes the essential characteristic of their understanding of 'la vie' is that it represents a movement forwards towards a better situation, a state which is encapsulated in the concept of the 'but ignoré'.

Nature and justice - a beautiful but doomed relationship

That justice exists in the 'but ignoré' is uncontroversial. For our purposes that promise (of deferred justice) is the closest we shall get in *Les Rougon-Macquart* to grand-scale abstract justice. This is the basis on which the creed of 'la vie' is based - that commitment to 'la vie' will lead to the 'but ignoré' where everything will be golden and glorious. More controversial is when Pascal appears to suggest that there is justice in nature itself.

Nature's moral neutrality is made very clear in the novels, where her indifference towards human beings is underlined. There is an arbitrary quality to the operation of

resté au contact du peuple - mais d'une connaissance tempérée par la sagesse du bon sens. Ces personnages chantent la vie en toute connaissance de cause' (Naudin-Patriat, p.292).

¹⁶⁹ The insignificance of human beings in the grand scale of nature, and patterns of insect imagery in the novels feature below.

nature - as seen in the hailstorm in *Terre*.¹⁷⁰ *Débâcle* contains clear references to this pattern of weather contrasting with human activities - the battle rages under sunny skies, the first decent weather after days of rain during which the French army trudged across country. The sun becomes a nuisance.¹⁷¹ The carnage of the French defeat occurs in 'l'éternelle et souriante nature' (*Débâcle* 585). '[L]es massacres d'Illy, les angoisses de Sedan, n'empêchaient pas l'impassible nature d'être belle, à cette fin sereine d'un beau jour' (687). Likewise, the bloodshed of the Commune takes place in excellent weather.¹⁷²

A pattern of vocabulary styling nature as 'impassible',¹⁷³ or 'indifférent',¹⁷⁴ particularly in the later novels of the cycle appears to confirm this. The patterns of insect imagery also illustrate the insignificance and sheer tininess of humans in the immensity of nature. There is use of 'insecte' as well as the specific insect image of the ant. Sometimes the point is made abundantly clear by the use of a phrase such as 'insectes humains'.¹⁷⁵ More often, however, the insects are simply little black pinprick sized entities in the distance.¹⁷⁶ It is an image which is used frequently in *Débâcle*, where the Prussians are compared to insects, sometimes specifically as 'fourmis' or 'sauterelles' and almost always with the addition of the adjective 'noir'.

¹⁷⁰ Rognes is hit by a freak hailstorm, whereas across the plain others' crops are untouched. 'Qu'avaient-ils fait pour être punis de la sorte? Ni sécurité, ni justice, des fléaux sans raison, des caprices qui tuaient le monde. [...] Ceux-ci épargnés, ceux-là saccagés, et à quelques kilomètres de distance : vrai! quelle déveine de se trouver du mauvais côté!' (*Terre* 462-463). The peasants seem to accept that there is no justice in nature.

¹⁷¹ 'Il faisait très beau, le ciel était d'un bleu admirable. "C'est crevant tout de même," répéta-t-il [Jean Macquart], "ce cochon de soleil qui ne se décide pas à foutre le camp!"' (*Débâcle* 697).

¹⁷² 'To heighten the horrors of war, Zola frequently employs apathetic fallacy. He interjects references to the serenity and beauty in nature when man slaughters man on the battlefield' (Hewitt, *Living Pillars*, p.118).

¹⁷³ For example : 'l'impassible nature n'est qu'un continuel champ de massacre' (*Débâcle* 560), and later in the same novel, lieutenant Rochas dies 'écrasé sous la nécessité de l'énorme et impassible nature' (704).

¹⁷⁴ This adjective is used particularly in *Terre* to describe the earth. The peasants rage against the earth : 'Combien pourtant elle était indifférente et ingrate, la terre!' (*Terre* 434). Fouan refers to her as 'la terre ingrate' (733) and 'l'indifférente' (734).

¹⁷⁵ For example : 'le branle de ces insectes humains en marche' (*Germinal* 1163), 'il y avait nuit et jour des insectes humains fouissant la roche' (1188). Saccard sees the steps of the Bourse 'comme mouchetées maintenant d'une montée continue d'insectes humains' (*Argent* 20), Mme Caroline recalls the developments at Port-Saïd where 'les fourmis humaines s'étaient multipliées' (59). Much use is made of insect imagery in *Débâcle*, including reference to a 'noire fourmilière humaine' (*Débâcle* 566).

¹⁷⁶ Some such images can be explained by the particular perspective of the viewer - sometimes a long distance away either horizontally or vertically, for example Hélène Grandjean and her Passy window overlooking Paris in the distance, where everything looks like miniature toys : 'gros comme des jouets d'enfant' (*Page* 851).

For example, Silvine has the impression of '[u]ne invasion noire, des sauterelles noires, encore et encore, si bien qu'en un rien de temps, on n'a plus vu la terre'.¹⁷⁷

The smallness of human characters is further suggested by the contrast between their tininess and the enormity of the (natural) environment in which they exist. The doll-sized Lazare and Louise walk along the beach 'sous le ciel immense' (*Joie* 936), Delaherche sees Kaiser Wilhelm through his spyglass as 'infiniment petit', a mere smudge of colour 'sous le vaste ciel bleu' (*Débâcle* 623). The harvesting peasants of Rognes are in a seemingly endless landscape: 'l'homme [...] avec son corps d'insecte, si petit dans cette immensité'.¹⁷⁸ The use of insect imagery, particularly when the minuscule individuals pull together as a group and pool their strength into a communal project parallels the pattern of each person making their own contribution to 'la vie'. This imagery is complemented by the prominence in *Les Rougon-Macquart* of the blurred line between animals and humans.¹⁷⁹ These features serve to show that in the grand scheme of things, humans and their concerns are of minimal importance.

Pascal seems unwilling to accept the indifference of nature. Pascal is both a practitioner and a philosopher, whose work divides into, not always clearly, on the one hand, practical research, and, on the other hand, into more abstract ruminations on the role of humanity and the forces at work in the universe. There is a distinct parallel

¹⁷⁷ *Débâcle* 536. Weiss identifies the Prussians as 'ces lignes noires en marche, ces fourmis noires qui défilent' (556). Like Silvine, Henriette also sees the soldiers overwhelming the environment: 'les troupes prussiennes, les fourmis noires défilant sans cesse, peu à peu perdues au fond de l'ombre croissante' (560). The image is repeated several times in very few pages: 'un si noir fourmillement de troupes allemandes' (571), 'le flot d'hommes, le fourmillement noir' (571) and 'tout le fourmillement noir des Prussiens' (581).

¹⁷⁸ *Terre* 564. 'Maintenant, chaque parcelle de la petite culture avait le sien [sèmeur], ils se multipliaient, pullulaient comme de noires fourmis laborieuses, mises en l'air par quelque gros travail, s'acharnant sur une besogne démesurée, géante à côté de leur petitesse; et l'on distinguait pourtant, même chez les plus lointains, le geste obstiné, toujours le même, cet entêtement d'insectes en lutte avec l'immensité du sol, victorieux à la fin de l'étendue et de la vie' (377).

¹⁷⁹ The humanisation of animals in the cycle - particularly good examples are Mathieu (*Joie*), Bonhomme (*Pascal*) and Gédéon (*Terre*) - and the animalisation of human characters is a well documented aspect of the novels. The latter is seen for example in *Fortune* where Pascal finally loses patience with his mother's efforts to establish him as a society doctor in Plassans. He attends her political salons and watches the habitués with 'l'intérêt d'un naturaliste', observing the local worthies as one might animals in a zoo. So when Félicité attempts to persuade him to aspire to becoming their doctor: "'Je ne suis pas vétérinaire,'" répondit-il enfin, poussé à bout' (*Fortune* 96).

between this double act of Pascal's and the two ways in which he wants to see nature operating in the novels.

The first of these is descriptive. This means nature as a series of observable phenomena, a morally-neutral (amoral) force at work in the world - and includes genetics, greenery, weather and so forth. This is, of course, the stock in trade of a natural scientist and doctor such as Pascal, whose observation of natural phenomena forms much of his study of heredity, foetal development, amongst other elements of his pioneering research. The second way in which Pascal considers nature to operate is as a prescriptive force at work in the world. This force has an agenda, one which is connected to the process of working towards the 'but ignoré', a force which is far from amoral, a concept which falls much more into the realm of Pascal the philosopher and prophet.

Can the revered scientist have his cake and eat it too? Even if nature were to operate in two distinct ways in the novels - and the line between prescriptive and descriptive is too blurred to suggest that she does - he still wants to support the moral agenda of 'la vie' by connecting it to the amoral force which is descriptive nature. Nature is fundamentally either one or the other, and the overwhelming indication in the novels, as we saw above, is that it operates amorally - descriptively - so, the only time it dons a prescriptive guise is when that is projected onto it by the characters.

Pascal is one of the principal culprits in this regard. In the famous argument in the garden, Pascal's response to Clotilde's charges that there is no justice in nature, is one of the key statements of principle in *Pascal*:

'C'est vrai,' dit-il à demi-voix, comme à lui-même, 'l'égalité n'existe pas. Une société qu'on baserait sur elle, ne pourrait vivre. Pendant des siècles, on a cru remédier au mal par la charité. Mais le monde a craqué; et, aujourd'hui, on propose la justice ... La nature est-elle juste? Je la crois plutôt logique. La logique est peut-être une justice naturelle et supérieure, allant droit à la somme du travail commun, au grand labeur final.'¹⁸⁰

¹⁸⁰ *Pascal* 993. This notion of nature's injustice is also seen in one of Pascal's comments about the family dossiers: 'la lutte des intelligences et des cœurs contre la nature injuste' (1016). Aristide Saccard is described as being 'sous la protection impassible de l'injuste nature' (*Pascal* 1010). Note also how he makes a connection between logic and a movement ('allant droit') towards the 'but ignoré'

Pascal accepts Clotilde's splitting of 'égalité' and 'justice' and suggests of the two that 'justice' appears to have a broader jurisdiction. We can perhaps read in his 'on propose' the demands of the other groups of characters discussed in earlier chapters of the thesis. His allusion to charity suggests the activities of the female porte-parole characters and their awareness of its shortcomings. He denies nature both an inherent 'justice' and an inherent 'égalité', and instead identifies logic as nature's principal attribute, and sees in this logic a potential for a 'justice naturelle et supérieure'.

In the preparatory documentation for *Pascal* the following passage appears:

La logique, serait-elle une justice supérieure, naturelle. N'est-ce pas l'homme qui a introduit la justice, par un besoin humain? Il faudrait savoir d'où vient l'idée de justice, pour la substituer à l'idée de charité. (*RM* V 1593)

We saw how Pascal conceded to Clotilde that nature is not inherently just, and as the *ébauche* seems to suggest, justice is a human concept which has nothing to do with nature. It is a human concept which Pascal cannot resist attributing to nature, happy to admit a natural justice existing in logic. It certainly seems to us that logic, as used in the novels under discussion here, equates more or less to nature. Pascal's philosophical sleight of hand is disguised behind terms such as 'logique' and 'évolution', words which seem, especially when mouthed by a scientist, to be eminently reliable.

If this logic is an alternative justice, as Pascal suggests, he is still grounding justice in nature, which, as we have indicated, is illogical, albeit compelling. An association made between nature and justice is attractive. That justice could be allied with the great force of nature which rolls powerfully through *Les Rougon-Macquart* gives it a certain credibility by association. But there is a fundamental problem. Justice is a moral notion which is logically incompatible with the amoral force of nature.

(as we saw earlier, 'labour' and 'travail' cover the same ground, and the adjectives 'grand', 'commun' and 'final' enhance the connection).

The apparent prescriptive force of nature in the novels is simply the projection of characters such as Pascal. He is unable firstly to resist the urge to make an alternative religion out of nature and secondly to ascribe a moral impetus to her powerful operation. What can motivate the characters to make this connection? Their essential optimism dictates that they ascribe some optimistic goal to the great force of nature - which has (in their creed of 'la vie') replaced traditional religion for them - to validate their own contribution to progress as having a good end in view (Denise, for example, is sure that what she is doing is not bad). A little like the author of the series, as we shall see in the next section, they wish to harness the force for good.

Justice in the 'but ignoré'

A possible source of general justice, untainted by any definition by a particular group, or by any association with their interests, has been identified by these characters. It is not of this world, rather it is deferred, contingent on the advent of the new social order represented by the 'but ignoré'. It is merely a promise, something which might never eventuate, but which, according to these characters, is on its way.

What sort of credibility do they have? Can we trust them, or need we write them off like the revolutionary dreamers we met in the last chapter? After all, one alternative religion is like another, or is it? What we should take from Pascal and the female porte-paroles is their overwhelming optimism, which, when coupled with their active efforts to commit themselves to 'la vie' and the promise of the 'but ignoré', represents a combination of dreaming and doing which escapes the other groups of characters we have studied. They have a more enlightened approach to the world than the primitives and a more active approach than the revolutionaries and are not tarnished by self-interest like the representatives of the legal system.

Their reasonable moderation contrasts with the febrile desperation of the revolutionaries we encountered in the previous chapter. In contrast to the revolutionaries, this group of characters advocates neither revolution nor violent quick-fix solutions to social problems. Instead they appear to recognise that the

enormity of the task ahead requires a process of evolution, and that their role in this will be to make an active, albeit small, contribution to this inexorable process. If their understanding of this force at work is not complete, or even articulated, they sense it to be working towards a good and worthwhile goal and commit themselves to it, confident that their efforts are being expended in the right direction.

They do not attach importance to being there when the new order arrives, and they also differ from the revolutionaries in their lack of interest in personal glory and individual success. Likewise their unselfishness and integrity set them apart from the representatives of the legal system. The notion that it is better to make an actual achievement, even if small, rather than embarking on high sounding large-scale projects which come to nothing, seems to be made clear in *Les Rougon-Macquart*.

As we have seen, Pascal and the female porte-paroles are all travelling down the same road, that of 'la vie' which they are confident leads to the 'but ignoré', and to justice, amongst other delights. Whilst all on the same side, there is an interesting point of comparison between Pascal and the female porte-parole characters. It is a difference which brings out an issue which has been bubbling away under the surface of *Les Rougon-Macquart* and which perhaps goes some way towards explaining the unalloyed approval we sense in the novels for the female porte-paroles, and which perhaps accounts for the merest whiff of reservation which attaches to Pascal.

Put simply, critics have identified a split between male and female characters in the cycle. Discussing *Joie*, David Baguley views the novel as a 'véritable débat entre l'intellectuel et la femme, entre les revendications de l'esprit et du corps'.¹⁸¹

Pauline's closer connection to nature and her capacity to cope with material problems, as opposed to Lazare's tussle with metaphysical issues, seem to earn Zola's approval.

Dans l'œuvre de Zola, la femme conserve son rôle - ose-t-on dire, en notre époque d'émancipation féminine - *naturel*, se maintenant près des réalités de la nature. De ce fait, elle réclame une vue intuitive de la vie, écoute une raison non raisonnée, mais plus profonde, qui passe sur les complications et ramène à l'essentiel. Quand elle échappe aux fatalités sociales qui risquent de la dépraver, elle incarne toute la sagesse zolienne, qui est à la fois un art de vivre

¹⁸¹ David Baguley, 'L'anti-intellectualisme de Zola', *CN*, 42 (1971), 119-129 (p.124).

et un art de penser. [...] Les femmes sages de Zola se maintiennent dans les limites de cette conception du bon sens, pour représenter une sorte de raison universelle que le romancier oppose aux désordres intellectuels du moment historique. [...] Pour elles, la vie fournit ses propres justifications; il suffit de s'en remettre à son entendement supérieur.¹⁸²

And the female porte-paroles do just that. They have an instinctive confidence that things will be fine if the precepts of 'la vie' are followed. They sense that nature will be their guide.¹⁸³ Françoise Naudin-Patriat says of the female porte-parole characters:

Elles nous communiquent leur foi optimiste dans la vie, dans le travail. Plus proches de la nature, elles paraissent plus réceptives que l'homme au monde des sensations, d'où leur valorisation par le romancier, et leur ancrage dans une fonction traditionnelle. [...] L'espérance ne provient pas d'une connaissance intellectuelle abstraite, puisée dans les livres, mais d'une appréhension sensuelle de la vie. (Naudin-Patriat, p.292)

Observing that women represent 'le principe de la matière, alors que l'homme incarne presque toujours celui de l'esprit', Chantal Bertrand-Jennings adds:

En revanche, toutes les femmes, même les personnages secondaires, apparaissent comme solidement enracinées dans la vie qu'elles subissent plutôt qu'elles ne la dominent. Elles sont la vie; elles ne pensent pas. (Bertrand-Jennings, *L'Eros et la Femme*, p.46)

As we saw, this distinction is illustrated by the observation that Pascal ('idée') and his insistence on enunciating his belief in a series of contradictory statements of principle contrasts with the belief which the female porte-parole characters ('raison') have instinctively taken on board and in accordance with which they act.

Whilst each of the female porte-parole characters is identified as an intelligent woman, this intelligence veers towards the practical and instinctive, as the critics suggested. Like Sigismond Busch, Mme Caroline is described as 'une intelligence' (*Argent* 60), but the pejorative edge is taken off this as, in addition to book-learning, her education has been derived not just from her travelling and teaching, but also from the hard knocks she has received. She has been 'si instruite par la dure expérience'

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 125. 'Cette quiétude morale est impossible pour l'intellectuel, qui veut savoir, contester et prévoir' (*ibid.*).

¹⁸³ 'Cette découverte intuitive débouche ainsi sur l'espoir, espoir vague et mesquin pour le lecteur plus intellectuel qui exige des pronostics plus rationnels, mais certain pour qui en sent les effets' (*ibid.*, p.126).

(67). She downplays her intellectual background, claiming that “‘j’ai beaucoup trop lu pour une femme’”.¹⁸⁴ In reference to Mme Caroline, Françoise Naudin-Patriat says on this point:

Il y a presque une opposition entre le savoir théorique et la vie, si bien que Mme Caroline est obligée de se renier en tant qu’intellectuelle pour s’abandonner aux sensations, pour en apprécier la jouissance.¹⁸⁵

This sort of practical intelligence, derived from an experience of reality, is contrasted with the flights of fancy seen in the ‘idées’ of the male characters with whom the female porte-paroles associate and to whom they appear to be made subordinate. Each of these men, Pascal, Lazare, Mouret and Saccard, does get carried away at some point.

It seems to us that one example which shows this difference is the attitude towards justice exhibited by Pascal and the female porte-parole characters. Pascal, the intellectual, labours to find a satisfactory explanation for justice and, as we saw, becomes tied up in his own reasoning, whereas the female porte-paroles do it, rather than seek to locate it intellectually. Eminently practical characters, they are indifferent to abstract notions. Whilst the other groups of characters we have seen earlier are quick to use the word ‘justice’ - and Pascal is not averse to this either - it appears very infrequently in the porte-parole characters’ mouths and novels.

Pauline’s case, for example, resembles that of Françoise Fouan in *Terre*, whose idea(l) of justice is related not to a broad ranging concept but simply to the precisely equal distribution of property between herself and her sister, Lise. Pauline’s decision to release her cousin Lazare from their engagement comes at the end of a period of anguished reflection. It is a decision dictated by her concept of justice:

En tout cas, elle devait lui permettre de choisir : c’était juste, et l’idée de justice restait en elle debout, souveraine. (*Joie* 1023)

¹⁸⁴ *Argent* 74. This ‘trop’ is repeated in the *discours indirect libre* where she is described as ‘d’une érudition trop vaste’ (163).

¹⁸⁵ Naudin-Patriat, p.292. The logical extreme of this is Désirée Mouret - all practical knowledge and no IQ whatsoever.

She goes further than simply freeing Lazare from his commitment to her, she makes an active effort to bring about his marriage with Louise - acting against her own desires and interests, again in the name of justice:

Il fallait les marier, cela retentissait en elle comme un ordre, comme une voix de raison et de justice qu'elle ne pouvait faire taire.¹⁸⁶

In the preparatory notes for *Argent*, Zola outlines the role for Mme Caroline in the novel: 'un peu le chœur antique, le personnage qui jugera, qui sera la bonté, la justice, au-dessus des désastres, surtout l'espoir en la vie, au milieu de la constatation du pessimisme' (*RM* V 1249), which suggests a broad context justice. In the novel itself, however, the reference to 'sa volonté de justice' (*Argent* 361) is in the context of her refusal to visit Saccard in prison, related principally to Saccard's having implicated her brother in the fraud of the Banque Universelle, and, to a lesser extent, her grief for the other victims of the financial disaster. On another occasion where 'juger' is used of her, the context is again personal - her attitude towards Saccard. 'Aussi arriva-t-elle à ne plus vouloir le juger' (162). Note how she consciously adopts a non-judgmental standpoint.¹⁸⁷

Another limiting of justice to the personal domain is seen in *Bonheur*, where the only reference connecting Denise and justice is an episode when she is 'révoltée contre l'injustice' (*Bonheur* 498), regarding snide remarks about her hair made by her colleagues and sanctioned by Mouret. Intellectually, justice appears to be a matter of indifference for them, but as demonstrated by their active charity and concern for those around them, if one quizzed them directly on the point, we can imagine their approval.

Clotilde's association with divine justice separates her from the others. It is referred to in the early stages of the novel with 'le bon Dieu' as its focus, by the end of the novel it is the 'enfant inconnu' on whom she has centred her aspirations for justice. In

¹⁸⁶ *Joie* 1030. Much earlier in the novel, when she considers making up with Louise after a falling out, she is aware that bringing Louise back into the picture could lose her Lazare. It is 'une révolte de l'idée de justice' (996) which sees Pauline overlook her own interests and reconcile with her rival.

¹⁸⁷ On the next page 'en ne le jugeant pas indigne d'elle' (163), Mme Caroline does pay Saccard the compliment of retaining his place in both her bed and her good books.

her argument with Pascal in the garden she refers to 'la grande et sainte justice' (*Pascal* 993), and at the end of the novel, she looks back on her religious beliefs and her need for justice as 'l'illusion de l'absolue justice' (1212). For Clotilde, in a world where 'la grande et sainte justice n'est plus' (993), there is neither 'égalité' nor 'justice', and the use of both terms suggests a difference between the two.¹⁸⁸ Context also seems to imply that the former term is more connected to quantifiable matters, such as strength or financial power, whereas the latter has more of a moral connotation.

In spite of this gender-based difference, these characters are united as a group in the novels. Not one of them demands justice as the revolutionary characters did. Not one of them seeks to impose justice like the representatives of the legal system. Each of them demonstrates an active commitment to the cause. Between them they identify two openings for justice in (and around) *Les Rougon-Macquart*. The porte-parole characters have their small-scale, non-judgmental series of contributions to the lives of those around them in the here-and-now, and Pascal enunciates the possibility of the 'but ignoré' which is the repository of a more abstract justice. Clotilde's divine justice adds another possibility into the mix.

We can see in the attitude towards the creed of 'la vie' another example of the male-female split. Pascal, in his quest for meaning and his insistence on labelling - all part of his scientist's urge to explain everything - attempts to work incompatible elements into a statement of principle, as we saw in his efforts to connect nature and justice, which led to some logical inconsistencies. Likewise, his careful enunciation of the creed of 'la vie' betrays a similar need to encapsulate, categorise and control the world - a rational, intellectual and masculine need. Whilst Pascal enunciates a belief in 'la vie' and arranges his life in accordance with what he identifies as its precepts, the female porte-parole characters practise what he preaches without perceiving the need to adopt a formulated viewpoint.

¹⁸⁸ When, in the concluding pages of the novel she recalls the conversation (and her conversion to Pascal's views) she again uses both terms: 'cette existence exécration, sans égalité, sans justice' (*Pascal* 1210).

This is no surprise, given that Pauline and Mme Caroline both display a reasoned abandon of (traditional) religion. They have the strength and confidence to trust their instinct.¹⁸⁹ Mme Caroline's crisis of faith is contrasted with her brother's somewhat childlike practice of Catholicism. She only laments her loss of faith in extreme circumstances - for example when she learns of Saccard's affair with the baronne Sandorff she envies the support her brother appears to draw from his faith (*Argent* 60, 205). She has 'le mortel regret de ne pouvoir aller s'agenouiller et se soulager dans une église' (207).

Mme Caroline in general is stoic in her acceptance of religion's limitations for her. It seems that religion is a casualty of her rational and intelligent approach to life. In the final pages of the novel, her hymn of optimism and hope for the future is completely unconnected with religion, the images of renaissance being connected to nature's cycles rather than any Christian notion of resurrection.

As part of her education at Bonneville, Pauline undertakes religious instruction and prepares for her first communion. In spite of her willingness to learn and her application to her studies, Pauline is not responsive to the Church's teachings: 'Un seul livre l'ennuyait, le catéchisme' (*Joie* 847). In her case, more clearly than in that of Mme Caroline, the connection is made between her rational approach to life and her rejection of traditional religion. She does not fear the unknown, perhaps seeing it as Pascal does, as the hitherto unexplained.

To Lazare's suggestion that 'les femmes devaient avoir de la religion' (*Joie* 994) and his not understanding why she is no longer practising, Pauline responds as follows:

Et elle donna ses raisons, de son air paisible. 'C'est bien simple, la confession m'a blessée, je pense que beaucoup de femmes sont comme moi ... Puis, il m'est impossible de croire des choses qui me semblent déraisonnables. Dès lors, à quoi bon mentir, en feignant de les accepter? ... D'ailleurs, l'inconnu ne m'inquiète pas, il ne peut être que logique, le mieux est d'attendre le plus sagement possible.' (*Joie* 994)

¹⁸⁹ Pauline 'ne s'illusionnait plus' (*Joie* 904), and Mme Caroline considers herself 'sans illusions' (*Argent* 206).

Whilst they do not intellectualise in the way Pascal does, the female porte-parole characters nevertheless identify 'la vie' as an important force and one towards which they have a positive attitude. They do not need to be told to put their faith in it, their commitment to the cause is instinctive. We learn early on, for example, that Denise has 'une passion de la vie et de la lumière' (*Bonheur* 403) and that one of the key reasons informing her support of modern commerce is 'son amour instinctif de la logique et de la vie' (574). Their response is instinctive and emotional, inherently and essentially feminine. As the critics have suggested, they have more of a grasp on practical reality, and we saw this in their attitude towards justice.

There are implications from this 'idée'/'raison' split for the novels. In the unquestioned approval for the female porte-parole characters (as we established at the start of the chapter) and the apparent valuing of deeds over words, seems to be an instance of content reflecting form. For it seems to us that it is possible to find in *Les Rougon-Macquart* an oblique attack on rational thinking - certainly on abstract philosophising - and a recommendation to enjoy the simple pleasures which life has to offer. Discussing *Joie*, Robert Ziegler comments:

Zola's book also advocates enjoying the simplicity of basic oral pleasures, as Chanteau, whose diet forbids him all but the most lenitive foods, still proclaims the goodness of life, and l'abbé Horteur turns aside Lazare's tormented questions about the soul's immortality in order to content himself with smoking his pipe and cultivating his vegetables.¹⁹⁰

In a sense, Zola leads by example, allowing justice, amongst other 'big ideas' to slide around in the novels. Philip Walker has made a detailed study of Zola's inconsistency in metaphysical matters, observing that Zola 'is constantly contradicting himself, erasing with one hand what he writes with the other'.¹⁹¹ Walker is driven to conclude:

Furthermore, not only the series as a whole, but also more than one of the individual novels in it are remarkable for their extreme philosophical and religious ambiguity.¹⁹²

¹⁹⁰ 'Creativity and the feminine in Zola's *La Joie de vivre*', *Excavatio*, 11 (1998), 31-38 (p.37).

¹⁹¹ 'Zola : Poet of an Age of World Destruction and Renewal', in *Critical Essays on Emile Zola*, ed. by David Baguley (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1986), pp.172-185 (p.184).

¹⁹² Walker, *Critical Essays*, pp.184-185.

He generously sees in this 'vast cacophony' of different views much of the richness of Zola's writings.¹⁹³

No other great novelist that I can think of is more radically incoherent on the philosophical or religious level than Zola. Although the frequent recurrence of a large number of ideas provides his writings with a certain consistency, not even the semblance of a logical system binds them together. The enormous efforts that he made - especially, it would seem, in his last years - to arrive at some overall logical order did not get him very far.¹⁹⁴

It is both liberating and frustrating for us that Zola does not nail down justice in *Les Rougon-Macquart*, and according to Philip Walker, many other important issues are also left to float freely throughout Zola's work, and that 'it is precisely with respect to the most central questions that he provides us with the most divergent answers'.¹⁹⁵

The whole notion of the 'but ignoré' - the repository for justice, 'bonheur' and all that is golden and glorious - would not be out of place with the rampant utopianism which is associated with Zola's later works. Some critics have identified the creation of a utopian vision in the latter stages of *Les Rougon-Macquart* as a Naturalist cop-out.¹⁹⁶ We prefer to think that Zola wanted to harness the powerful forces (the interplay of which is one of the key aspects of *Les Rougon-Macquart*) he had unleashed in his series of novels for good rather than bad. The angry young man with a point to prove who issued the dark indictment of the Second Empire in the early novels of the cycle had mellowed over the ensuing twenty-five years into the well-established middle-aged father who was looking optimistically towards the future.

The forces were there and they were powerful and although veering towards the grim, there were still sufficient chinks of hope. Alfred C. Proulx observes that Zola pushed open the chinks to allow a glimpse of a positive future:

Le Naturaliste qui, jusqu'ici s'était contenté de noter les faits et les événements, avec tout au plus des ébauches de conclusion, devient de plus en plus didactique, et commence à tirer ses conclusions. Les grandes forces, Vie, Mort,

¹⁹³ "Germinal" and Zola's philosophical and religious thought, p.88.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.87.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.87.

¹⁹⁶ For example, discussing the end of *Pascal*, Anne Belgrand observes that 'le ton lyrique et vibrant échappe totalement à la neutralité de l'observation naturaliste' (*Romantisme*, p.92).

Fécondité, Stérilité, restent toujours les forces impassibles qu'elles étaient, mais il se produit un décalage, un déséquilibre en faveur des forces positives. Au milieu de catastrophes nouvelles surgit un nouvel espoir plus fort que jamais dans la série.¹⁹⁷

Pascal identified 'bonheur universel' as one of his objectives, and the passages referring to the 'but ignoré' have distinct utopian overtones.¹⁹⁸ The utopian nature of the post-*Rougon-Macquart* novels is well established, and some critics see therein their shortcomings as literature.¹⁹⁹ Brian Nelson makes a surprising connection : 'Like Marx, Zola is more powerful and persuasive in his delineation of capitalist society than in the detailed elaboration of a future utopia.'²⁰⁰ David Baguley suggests that Zola's movement into utopianism might be due to the prevailing historical climate.²⁰¹

For Alfred C. Proulx, Zola was already sacrificing Naturalism after *Argent*.²⁰² Chantal Bertrand-Jennings thinks that the utopian rot set in with *Pascal*, identifying a 'utopisme facile et souvent outrancier qui verse parfois dans le prêche.'²⁰³ What is this utopianism if not a development of Zola's well-documented optimism?²⁰⁴ Some

¹⁹⁷ Proulx, *Aspects épiques*, p.112.

¹⁹⁸ Commenting on the close relationship which Pascal establishes between work and effort and the new order, Dorothy E. Speirs remarks: 'Incontestablement, l'équivalence travail / bonheur est un des cachets les plus caractéristiques de l'écriture utopique' ('Zola, lecteur de Fourier', in *Miscellanées Mitterand*, pp.57-63, p.60).

¹⁹⁹ Elliott M. Grant says of *Les Trois Villes*: 'Let it be said immediately that the trilogy consists of bad novels but interesting books which contain, as often in Zola's work, some magnificent passages' (*Emile Zola* (New York: Twayne, 1966), p.169). For Grant, the same cannot be said about *Les Quatre Evangiles*: 'They are bad novels, and in this case only one, *Travail*, is an interesting book' (p.174). He concludes: 'They demonstrate, beyond any doubt, the danger of attempting to put forth propaganda in the guise of creative literature' (p.177). Critics are calling for a reconsideration of Zola's post-*Rougon-Macquart* writings, for example, Alain Pagès, 'The reception of Zola's work' in *Centenary Colloquium*, pp.21-27 (p.22).

²⁰⁰ Nelson, *Bourgeoisie*, p.35. For Rita Schober, it detracts from the power of the works: 'Plus la proclamation de l'avenir est abstraite, plus Zola se réfugie dans la prédication d'idéaux sympathiques au lieu de présenter les grands problèmes vitaux, les contradictions de l'époque et les conflits sociaux, et plus l'action, agencée autour de mots clés prend un caractère subtil et ennuyeux' ('*Le Docteur Pascal* ou le sens de la vie,' *CN*, 53 (1979), 53-74, p.74).

²⁰¹ 'Car il est de fait que les *Evangiles* sont issus d'un climat politique et social extraordinairement polarisé : républicains contre réactionnaires, anticléricaux contre catholiques [...] [D]e la polémique naît l'utopie, issue de la suppression de l'insupportable tension des contraires' (Baguley, *Genres*, p.156).

²⁰² '[U]ne sentimentalité, vaguement efféminée, un lyrisme romantique, détruisent la puissance et la signification mystérieuse aussi bien que la grandeur que les mythes-conflits avaient atteintes' (Proulx, *Aspects épiques*, p.121).

²⁰³ Bertrand-Jennings, *Eros et la Femme*, p.130.

²⁰⁴ 'Zola se projette toujours dans l'avenir et, aussi bien dans ses articles que dans ses romans, à l'analyse d'une réalité présente profondément pessimiste répond une foi dans un avenir meilleur qui assurera le bonheur universel' (Daniel Delas, 'Zola et la démocratie parlementaire', *Europe*, 468-469 (1968), 27-36, p.36).

would see in it a Naturalist cop-out. For David Baguley, however, the post-*Rougon-Macquart* works retain the 'esprit polémique' which characterised their predecessors :

Ces textes ne représentent pas une simple fuite dans le rêve d'un avenir idéal. A la fin de sa carrière, Zola est aussi combatif, aussi 'engagé' que jamais.²⁰⁵

Rather than seeing a neat change in emphasis between one cycle and the next, Guy Robert suggests a change in emphasis mid-way through *Les Rougon-Macquart*:

C'est plutôt autour de 1883 qu'on pourrait situer l'inflexion décisive des idées de Zola. C'est alors que, avec *Au Bonheur des Dames* et *La Joie de vivre* que commence à s'imposer à lui le thème de l'acceptation confiante; la vie est nécessairement bonne en dépit de ses laideurs.²⁰⁶

It is this optimism which allows the female porte-parole characters to move forward with calm confidence towards a better future. Critics have made persuasive connections between Zola's life (his growing stature as a man of letters, his paternity) and this apparent change of direction in the tone of his fictional output. Whether or not this increased measure of utopianism compromised his Naturalist principles, and whether or not there are illogicalities in the way Pascal envisages nature operating in the world, it is ultimately unimportant for our purposes.

Admitting its necessity for humankind, Pascal seeks to locate justice in nature, with qualified success. What does appear to be the case in the novels is that 'la vie' or nature, unjust as she is, is believed to be the way towards the 'but ignoré' and the glorious justice which resides there. Justice of this sort is absent in the here-and-now world of *Les Rougon-Macquart*, but we are invited to share in the optimism of these authoritative characters and commit ourselves with confidence to life in the meantime, as she guides us gently towards a better world. They identify a possible source of justice and work towards it, they neither demand justice nor seek to impose their version of it. They take a leap of faith and their example is as clear an authorial message as we can derive from the novels, as Zola talks directly to us through his

²⁰⁵ Baguley, *Genres*, p.148, p.147.

²⁰⁶ Robert, *Emile Zola*, p.156.

appointed representatives and urges us to join their optimistic commitment to a new order.

CONCLUSION

JUSTICE IN *LES ROUGON-MACQUART*

‘Certes, oui, une illusion, la vérité, la justice!’ (*Bête* 1317)

The name of Emile Zola is linked with truth and justice in the public consciousness, thanks principally to his role in the Dreyfus Affair. The interest extends, however, to his literary work. At his death he left preparatory notes for a novel entitled *Justice* and his later cycles of novels are marked by frequent eulogising of concepts such as truth, freedom and justice. But is there a place for justice in the earlier and more celebrated cycle of *Les Rougon-Macquart*, that twenty-volume history of the Second Empire?

We identified an unwillingness on the part of the author to establish justice as a coherent concept in the novels, due in part to what some critics have described as an anti-metaphysical attitude. We thus had to seize justice as and when we found it, drawing on a relatively meagre stock of source material: some several dozen direct references to justice in the course of the ten thousand pages of *Les Rougon-Macquart*. We found characters who ally themselves explicitly with justice. Coming from the margins of society, they are a tiny minority in the novels. Nevertheless, they do form recognisable groups (which are established by everything from patterns of vocabulary to physical resemblance), and each group promotes its particular notion of justice.

The potential of an abstract concept such as justice to carry various interpretations is a partial explanation of why the concept appears to slither around in the novels,

meaning different things to different groups of characters, and eluding a single, satisfactory definition. For example, the different meanings attributed by the groups of characters to justice range from dealing with fairness towards one's fellow human beings (female porte-paroles) to the most abstract idea of social equality with a fair distribution of rights and property (the revolutionaries) - 'chacun sa part', as befits a utopian vision of society.

In Chapter One we established the apparent lack of justice in *Les Rougon-Macquart*. The Darwinian universe of struggles and conflict, in which the strongest or most cunning survive, was illustrated by patterns of vocabulary and imagery, and seen in the primitive communities of Les Artaud and Bonneville. We noted, nevertheless, the somewhat ambiguous presentation of Darwinism in the novels. The apparent attempt to alleviate the full effects of an application of unalloyed Darwinism is seen firstly in the attribution of a positive goal to the operation of Darwinism - an approach which parallels the operation of the 'but ignoré' - and secondly in the possibility of the moderating influence of justice.

The idea of justice tempering the ravages of Darwinism was merely hinted at by Maurice in his comments in *Débâcle*, but justice as an alternative to a world ruled by 'le plus fort' is made more explicit in *Germinal*, as we saw in Chapter Two. That novel presents a particularly clear-cut Darwinian situation and, unlike the primitives, the miners are aware of the injustice of the situation, and commit themselves to doing something about it. There appears to be a development in their attitude towards justice, where a more limited idea of retributive justice gives way to a broader notion of social justice, which is itself given various interpretations by the revolutionary characters in Chapter Four. Sigismond Busch, for example, highlights a radical redistribution of wealth; Florent is interested in equal rights and reform of the political system, and Etienne leads the miners with the promise of a fairer share of the world's resources. They all demand a more equitable 'partage des biens' which stretches from voting rights and political power to hard-line socialism.

We saw in Chapter Three how 'la justice', instead of realising its potential to counteract the injustices of Darwinism, operated as a powerful weapon - a Darwinian

tool - in the hands of 'les plus forts', by which they retained their social supremacy. 'La justice' became an additional weapon in the arsenal of the already strong. This was reinforced by the way the 'faibles' felt disenfranchised from the legal system. Their belief that law and the legal system are on the side of the princes is confirmed in the novels. We saw a pattern of the bad enforcement of good laws and the good enforcement of bad laws. The operation of the legal system in the novels revealed 'la justice' to be something of a misnomer. The traditional connection made between the legal system and justice seemed to have no place in the world of the novels. Abuse of power and process characterised the operation of the legal system, where justice was neither mentioned nor seen. It was the legal system's association with the Second Empire which was to prove fatal - the regime rather than the legal system itself rendering justice as illusory as M. Camy-Lamotte would have us believe it to be.

It is in response to this perceived injustice of the Second Empire that the revolutionaries of Chapter Four propose their political alternatives. We suggested that the failure of these characters to institute a viable and just alternative to the prevailing regime was due to a combination of their personal inadequacy and Zola's apparently unfavourable attitude towards the notion of revolution itself.

Starting from Etienne's calls for justice in *Germinal*, we saw a pattern develop in which justice becomes an alternative religion for the dispossessed and marginalised. We noted patterns of religious imagery and vocabulary in the novels which supported this. By its very nature, an alternative religion suggests that the desired state does not exist right here right now. Justice is not a current reality, but a promise gleaming in the future, the deferred enjoyment of which will be the believers' reward.

The faith of Pascal and the female porte-paroles in 'la vie' is presented as a more credible belief than the alternative religion of justice pursued by the miners and the revolutionaries. Whereas the mere fact of creating and adhering to an alternative religion gives rise to some criticism of the revolutionaries and the miners, by the time of *Pascal* it is treated as an eminently praiseworthy approach, where the all-important 'but ignoré' is presented as the acceptable face of alternative religion in *Les Rougon-Macquart*, and as the most likely repository of justice.

In Chapter Five we identified what appeared to be a split between the male and female characters in the cycle, and examined how the instinctive 'raison' of the female porte-paroles contrasted with the intellectual 'idée' of Pascal. We noted that the female porte-paroles seemed indifferent to justice as an abstract concept, but they nevertheless worked to achieve it on a small scale by the fair treatment of those around them. They do not need to create an intellectualised framework for their optimism, they simply feel it. On the other hand, the revolutionary characters - all male - have a grander plan for a more abstract notion of justice, one which they will achieve through the laying down of laws, the traditional domain of the male.

A justice which is uncompromised by those who are associated with it is winking at us from a place somewhere beyond - in the utopian new order which is suggested by some of the characters in the novels. We can glimpse this untainted justice in *Les Rougon-Macquart*, but we cannot touch it. We do, however, have confidence in its eventual existence, not only through the knowledge of how the rest of the author's work pans out, but also because the clues are there in the later novels of the cycle. In part, this is because we can trust Pascal and the female porte-paroles, arriving as they do at their commitment to 'la vie' by means of reason or emotion respectively, and the association of this collection of credible characters with the 'but ignoré' where justice is located. Our confidence is further justified by firstly the patterns of imagery and secondly the upbeat endings which power the wave of optimism which rolls through the concluding texts in the cycle.

That there is a lack of consistency in the way in which justice features in the novels is neither fatal to its existence nor even particularly damaging to its importance. If anything, it is proof of its accommodating openness. Whilst initially limited to the particular interpretations of the characters, justice expands its jurisdiction in the 'but ignoré' where utopian fervour on the part of both Zola and his porte-paroles incorporates the earlier concerns for equal rights and fair treatment and surpasses them in a utopian idyll. After being circumscribed by the interpretation of individual characters, justice opens up again into an abstract concept.

As we noted at the outset, justice in *Les Rougon-Macquart* is a slippery customer, and perhaps it is unsurprising when we consider the evolving attitude towards justice of the author himself. Whilst justice may not be flagged like heredity or the iniquities of the Second Empire as a source of particular interest for the author, it could certainly not be denied some place in the novels, however peripheral or inconsistent. Indeed, the entire cycle might be seen as a concept in progress - a notion taking form.

By the time of the later cycles, Zola had the metaphysical bit well and truly between his teeth, and the didactic tone of those novels shows that his thinking had become more clear, and that he was willing to stand and deliver a coherent view of justice. We discussed the implications of this metaphysical certainty for the later works as fiction, and saw how some critics believe that Zola's evangelical approach was achieved only with the sacrifice of literary quality.

We should not feel let down that Zola did not arrive at a watertight definition of justice in *Les Rougon-Macquart*. That which he does do, as we have indicated, is to identify, particularly towards the end of the cycle, justice as a worthwhile objective. The clearest message appears to be that justice should be pursued modestly: we should attempt neither to impose nor demand justice, but simply practise it in our daily lives. The example of the female porte-parole characters is perhaps worth following. Let us leave the intellectualising to those who want to split philosophical hairs and make statements of principle. Why not follow in Mme Caroline's footsteps and simply commit ourselves to moving forward with confidence into the future, happy just to feel the kiss of the sun.

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This bibliography is not intended to be exhaustive, simply a reflection of the works consulted during the preparation of the thesis in its final form. Readers with a more general interest in Zola will, as we did, find a helpful starting point in the Zola-specific bibliographies compiled by Brian Nelson and David Baguley - the latter's bibliographical contribution to *Les Cahiers Naturalistes* will also prove useful.

In the list of articles and essays consulted, the following abbreviations are used:

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